

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY



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## THE HALF DECK

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A FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD boy, shivering with excitement and apprehension in spite of a new overcoat with the brave brass buttons of the British Merchant Marine, starting off alone on a voyage to the other side of the world. To-day, at thirty-eight, he commands a liner, but he has not forgotten his first years as apprentice in the half deck of the old tramp steamer *Monarch*. He will not forget, nor will you forget when you have read the book, his first crossing of the Line, when Boxley, the hard-boiled first mate, fell into the bath prepared for Neptune's neophyte; the winter passage through Magellan; the week-end spent in the South American gaol; the anxious hours in the English Channel, on a lee shore, with both steering-chains gone. Least of all will he forget the mutiny of the Chinese firemen, which left the boy in sole charge of the steamer.

*The Half Deck* is a moving narrative—an authentic contemporary chronicle which has the bite of life and which mounts steadily to a climax. It is, moreover, one of the few autobiographies of a seaman's life on a steamship.







Geoff. Grant

# The Half Deck

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BY  
CAPTAIN GEORGE H. GRANT



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
GORDON GRANT

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*To One who has sailed with me  
and listened to my yarns*





## FOREWORD

DANGER and death dance to the wild music of the gale, and when it is night they dance with a fiercer abandon, as if to allay the fears that beset the sailormen who feel their touch but see them not. It is only when the gale is over and the sailor's mind is freed to think its own thoughts again that he knows he has been the companion of danger and death. A surge of pride sweeps through him. The contact imbues him with a sense of illimitable power. He begins to realize that within him there is something greater than death, something that compels him to meet danger without a tinge of fear. He has become a man in the full sense of the word.



PART ONE



THE FIRST VOYAGE



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# THE HALF DECK

## CHAPTER I

### I ENTER THE HALF DECK

AS the night advanced towards the greying of the day, the air within the railway carriage became very chilly. At first I thought it was imagination, for I was warmly clad, but later I decided it was caused by loneliness. No one had entered the carriage since Glasgow had been left eight hours before, except the guard, who had pulled back the door leading into the corridor, thrust in his head, looked down at me and then, with a grunt of satisfaction, passed on his way. Having been paid by my father to keep an eye on me, it was enough for him to know that I was still upon the train.

I wished that he had spoken and, when he had gone, I wished that I had spoken to him. An urge rose within me to call him back, but as the sound of his footsteps receded along the corridor I huddled on the seat, my greatcoat with its shining brass buttons wrapped tightly around me, and, with my nose pressed against the window, I peered towards the mountains, which were black against a pale green dawn and near which lay the sea. A glimpse of the blue water would have revived my spirits, which were at a low ebb, for the adventurous life which had beckoned so insistently only the night before seemed to be drifting beyond the far rim of the horizon.

Suddenly I realized, with a glow of joy, that I was on my way. The enthusiasms of the night before returned, routing the chills from my bones. I fingered the buttons of my greatcoat while my eyes sought the sea bag, bulging full with new clothes, on the rack above my head. The vessel was at her wharf, somewhere beyond those hills, and waiting to take me on a voyage to strange places.

Quickly the daylight came and with it Newport, my destination. As soon as the train stopped and I had read the name upon the lamps, I jumped to my feet, feverishly excited, and, lifting the sea bag from the rack, turned towards the door; but tug and twist the handle as I might, it would not free the lock. Frantically I dropped the window and thrust out my head. The guard was twenty paces or more away, unwinding a green flag with which he was about to signal the engineer.

"Here! Here!" I cried, hardly able to contain the frenzy of my agitation. "Please let me out!"

An amused grin overspread his face as he clasped the flag and walked towards the carriage.

"All right, all right, lad," he shouted. "Hold your hurry. You'll be wishin' you were back on the train before you're many days at sea." Unlocking the door he went on, a wistful note creeping into his voice, "But I wish I was young like you an' settin' forth on my first voyage." He looked down at me as I stepped on to the platform and asked: "It is your first voyage, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," I answered, proud to have him know it.

"I thought so, I thought so!" said he, shaking his head contemplatively, and after a pause added: "Well, the best of luck to you!"



BRUCE BURNS

He patted my shoulder and waved the green flag; then, turning about, walked off. A toot of the whistle and the train commenced to move. I stood on the platform, watching the carriages with their drawn blinds speed past, feeling unutterably alone. The link binding me to my home in Glasgow and the life I knew was being irrevocably severed and I was a little afraid.

"Ahoy there, sailor!" shouted a voice close behind me, startling me almost out of my skin.

Swinging on my heels, after I had recovered from my fright, I saw a burly chap more than six feet tall striding along the platform in my direction, his sun-bronzed face lighted up with a smile. Over a blue uniform he wore an oilskin coat which was glistening with rain. On his head, tilted at a rakish angle over the right eye, was a deep-sea cap, the chin-strap, badge, and buttons green with age and verdigris.

"You're young Grant, aren't you?" he asked, coming to a halt and extending his hand.

"Y-yes," I replied timidly, extending mine and wincing under the pressure of his iron fingers.

"You needn't be scared of me," said he with a laugh. "I won't kidnap you. I'm Bruce Burns, senior apprentice of the *Monarch* and one of the toughest devils on the Seven Seas. Because of that the Old Man, who is the captain, by the way, sent me in to meet you. He thought you might need a chaperon. Newport's a bad place for the likes of you." He laughed slyly and asked: "Did you have a jolly trip down from Glasgow?"

"Not so very," I answered, warming to him. "It was fearfully cold on the train."

Throwing back his shoulders, he laughed boisterously and his blue eyes twinkled so vivaciously that I thought they would pop out from their sockets.

"Cold?" he shouted. "That's a corking one! You'd better tell it to the mate. He'll warm you up. He's a rip-snortin' holy terror. He eats boys like you, bones and all." Bending towards me confidentially, he went on: "Hearken to one who knows! You'll soon be so bloomin' cold you'll forget that you were ever warm. You'll sleep in a wet bunk and like it because you'll be too tired to know any different. And when you turn out, you'll sing, 'Yo! Ho! For the life of a sailor', to kid yourself that you like it, and between me and you and the foremast, you will." His tone changed. "But get your baggage together and I'll call a cab, if there's one to be found at this ungodly hour. We've got to make full speed. The mate was yelling hell because I was sent for you, and when the mate does that, you step around at the double. There's



plenty of work to be done on the old tub an' only the boys to do it. The sailormen, being favoured of the gods, have been paid off to live the life of ease and luxury." He laid his hand on my shoulder and his face assumed a grave expression while he chanted with mock solemnity :

"Six days shalt thou labour  
And do all that thou art able;  
On the seventh thou shalt holystone the decks,  
And chip the blinkin' cable."

Then, laughing again, he turned away and walked off towards the station entrance with an exaggerated deep-sea roll to his giant strides. I shouldered my sea bag and trudged after him, a pleasant buoyancy lifting my heels.

Outside the station a drizzling rain blew cold on the wind which swirled down the street. The adjacent buildings were gloomy and forbidding in the wan light. No one was in sight. Standing alone, the rain biting at my face, I thought of a warm bed back in Glasgow and of a hot breakfast laid out on the table. But the thought vanished as quickly as it had come, for from around the corner of the station rolled a cab which stopped in front of me, and out of it leaped Burns.

Saluting, he said: "At your service, Admiral!" and when I laughed, he commanded: "Throw your dunnage—nautical for bags—on top."

"They'll get wet up there," I protested.

He staggered back as if I had struck him a blow.

"Wet?" he cried with amazement. "With what?"

"The rain!"

He held out his hands. He looked up towards the heavily laden sky, which seemed to be resting on the housetops, as if seeking something. His gaze came back to me.

"Rain! D'you call this rain?" he demanded to know; then continued before I could reply: "Holy mackerel! You haven't seen rain. This is only a Scotch mist which has wandered during the night to South Wales. Before many moons have passed over your grey hairs, you'll be prayin' for rain so that you'll be able to have a bath—

pronounced bawth, now that you are south of the border. It makes you grow. Rain, not the bawth. And puts hair on your chest . . . long, virile hairs for the pitch and the paint to stick to when you're working. But enough! Up with the bags!"

It was useless to protest and, I concluded, a sign of weakness, so with his aid up went the bags on to the seat beside the cabby and, entering the four-wheeler, off we went for the docks.

For a while we rolled along in silence, but I could feel his eyes weighing me. Being a trifle shy, it disconcerted me, frightening the questions I wanted to ask from my tongue.

Suddenly he asked, glancing quizzically around: "You're a bit young, aren't you?"

"No, not so very," I answered, striving to be nonchalant. "I'm three months over fourteen . . . be fifteen next birthday."

"Mmm! That is very old," said he, grinning all over his face. "I suppose you've come to sea to wear out your old clothes. You'll be retiring at the end of the voyage, too feeble for the life." Then the banter left his voice and the blue eyes became very grave as he said: "The sea's a bit rough at first. Not romantic and . . . er . . . thrillin', like we imagine it's going to be. There's always plenty of hard work an' hard times but there's lots of fun too. Learn to laugh when things go wrong and you'll come through. Weepin' and sulkin' will only get you a rope's end on the seat of your trousers and you want to be able to sit down with comfort when the day's work is done."

"But . . . but they don't punish you like that?" I asked fearfully.

"Don't they? And why not, I'd like to know? It never did a boy any harm. I've had it many a time. Can't say I liked it though. A bit rough on the tender skin of your sit-me-down. But the best way to avoid it is to say: 'Yes, sir' when addressed by an officer, obey their commands on the run, and never argue with them. If you can follow that advice, you'll be a credit to the sea

and I'll ask His Majesty to present you with a putty medal on the completion of your cadetship. You'll have earned it!"

All this bewildered me, so I remained silent. In Glasgow the Superintendent of the Line had informed me that, in exchange for my services and in lieu of wages, I would be taught the business of a seaman. He had stressed the point. He had not mentioned chastisement. In fact, he had led me to believe that I would strut the decks in my brass-bound uniform, aping the officers. I sensed his duplicity and felt that I had been tricked.

A hand slapped me on the shoulder.

"Cheer up, sailor boy," shouted my companion. "You'll soon be there. Remember the first hundred years are always the hardest and it's always coldest just before the dawn. The dawn is past, as the poets say . . . only the first hundred years lie ahead, like hungry wolves waiting to devour you."

His high spirits were infectious. I began to perceive that he had "come through" with a laugh in his heart, and if he could, so could I. A lump came into my throat. I squeezed his hand and felt the pressure of his on mine.

"That's the spirit," he cried. "Never say die until you're dead, nor falter by the way. The devil catches those who loiter. I'll help you over the first hurdle or two."

Swerving into a cobbled street, the four-wheeler stopped before the dock gates, beyond which towered the masts of many vessels. A policeman emerged from a hut to the right of the gate and, walking over, with the rain dripping from his cape, he looked in through the window at us.

"What ship?" he asked gruffly.

"The *Monarch*! The finest old tub in the port," answered Burns glibly.

"So she is, is she, smarty?" returned the policeman affably, looking me up and down. "Carry on!"

"Thanks," said Burns, saluting and shouting an order to the cabby.

The cab rolled through the gates leading to the basin



of the dock, which had a row of vessels made fast to the dolphins in the centre and another row under the coal tips which stood like hovering demons upon the quay wall.

"There's our packet!" exclaimed Burns, pointing over the horse's rump. "The one with the red funnel and black top."

It was with difficulty I stifled an exclamation of disappointment. In the back of my head was a romantic vision of tall spars, brave to the wind and sky. It vanished as, bending forward, I peered towards the *Monarch*. A cloud of dust enveloped her as a wagon was tipped up on the hoist to let the coal rumble down the chute. It cleared away. The *Monarch* was down by the head, as though sinking where she lay; her side was red with rust, her white-painted bulwark strake dirty; the gear hung dejectedly from her derrick heads; and her flags, sodden with rain, lay limp beneath the trucks like rags put out to dry. I saw no more. The cab rolled to the right and stopped under the coal tip.

"All right, young fellow! We've arrived," said Burns, swinging the door open. "Tumble out an' step lively. The mate may be watchin' us from behind the forrard deckhouse. A good impression created to-day may be a great help to you to-morrow."

I stepped lively and paid the cabby. My sea bag had been dumped on to the slimy black mud which lay under the coal tip. I picked it up and followed Burns, who had gone ahead, carrying my portmanteau. By the quay wall he was waiting for me.

"You'll have to dump your bag on board and scramble after it," he advised. "There's no gangway out here because the vessel has to be moved frequently under the tips so that each hatch can be loaded in rotation, and I can see nobody on the deck to lend us a hand."

I nodded that I understood. He threw my portmanteau on to a heap of ashes lying in the starboard forward corner of the after well deck. I heaved my sea bag after it and watched it roll over and over, clinkers and black ooze sticking to the white canvas. Only for a second did I think of the clean clothes neatly folded within, for Burns

had leapt nimbly from the quay wall to the bulwark rail and from the bulwark rail to the deck, where he stood gesticulating for me to follow his example.

I hesitated, not at all sure that I could. The water in the dock was lapping up between the quay and the hull as the vessel surged a little to her moorings. The bulwark rail was wet and slippery and the after well deck seemed to be a long way off.

"Nothing attempted, nothing won!" misquoted Burns, extending his arms. "Come on! I'll catch you!"

It was do or die! Drawing in a deep breath, I heaved myself through the air as the vessel seemed to surge away from the quay. My feet touched the bulwark rail . . . slipped. For a split second it seemed as though I would fall over the side, into the water between the vessel and the quay. Clutching at the air in a breathless effort, I recovered my balance and heaved myself forward, to fall sprawling on the ash heap, turning a somersault before the deck was reached.

"Great work!" exclaimed Burns. "There's the makings of a sailorman in you, all right."

Elated, not to say relieved, I scrambled to my feet. What did it matter if my new uniform, with its belted coat and brass buttons, was covered with ashes and black, slimy ooze? What did it matter if my hands and cheeks were scratched and bleeding? The deck was firm under my feet and I had the makings of a sailorman in me—not that I knew what the makings of a sailorman were.

Thanking Burns with my eyes, I stooped to pick up my sea bag, when a gruff voice froze me where I stood.

"What d' you think this is . . . a circus? Blast your eyes! I'll find something to take the nonsense out o' you. Come here!"

I looked round and up towards the voice.

On the after end of the bridge deck, leaning over the rails and glaring in a ruddy rage, was a man in short leather sea boots, dark paint-splattered trousers, and a pea-jacket which seemed too large. Around his neck was a dirty scarf and on his head an old sou'wester. His body was so squat, with the hands reaching down to the knees,



that he gave me the impression of a gorilla about to advance on an attack. In a face flushed with anger and blackened with coal dust, the eyes were small and alert, like the eyes of a squirrel. A walrus moustache worked up and down as the mouth chewed upon a quid of tobacco.

"Come here, boy!" he bellowed again.

I hesitated, retreated a pace or two, and shifted my gaze to Burns. He bent down, ostensibly to pick up my portmanteau, and whispered sibilantly:

"That's Mr. Boxley, the mate. Go up an' report your arrival. He's hungry for food."

With a wild-beating heart I pulled myself together and, scrambling over the ashes, ascended to the deck above. Mr. Boxley came towards me, his eyes appraising me as though I was for sale.

"You're Grant?" he thundered.

"Yes, sir," I answered quickly, remembering instinctively what Burns had advised.

"Huh!" snorted Mr. Boxley. "You're nothing but an infant! How can they expect me to run a vessel with the likes o' you?"

"I . . . I don't know, sir."

"None of your impertinence, boy. Hold your tongue or I'll skin you alive."

He spat on the ash heap and took a turn across the deck.

His eyes were blazing fire when again he confronted me.

"I've a good mind to send you back to Glasgow again,"

he shouted, and added with vehemence, "This isn't a nur-

sery!" He shook his fists above his head with rage.

He stormed: "How did you

manage to escape from your mother's apron strings?"

"I . . . I can work, sir," I protested, afraid he might send me back to Glasgow.

"Have you ever?" he flung at me.



MR. BOXLEY,  
FIRST MATE

"No—n—no, sir."

"Then how d' you know?"

He sniffed disdainfully and turned to Burns, who was standing behind him, near the rails, waiting for instructions.

"Take him in hand," he ordered. "Berth him with Tramer. He'll turn out with the rest of you at two bells. We'll make or break him before sailing day. Carry on!"

He gave me a furious look; then, swinging on his heels, disappeared around the corner of the deckhouse without again looking back.

Burns laughed quietly and said: "A holy terror, eh?"

I nodded, not quite sure what I thought.

"But don't mind him too much," Burns advised, "for his bark is worse than his bite. He can't forget that the days of the sailing vessels are about past. But you'd better shape up well within the next day or two. He'll overlook a lot if he sees that you're willin'. Now you'd better come and meet the gang. There are four of us on board, two in each cabin, which are known as the port and starboard half decks. You'll be in the port."

As I followed him towards a door, I resolved to shape up well, not only to please Mr. Boxley but to let him realize that I was not an infant. The insult had cut deeply.

The port half deck was long and narrow with a bunk on either side, each resting on a row of drawers made from mahogany, and having, one at the foot, the other at the head, a wardrobe. On the white-painted bulkhead opposite the door was a mirror, and under it a small settee on which sprawled a boy whom I judged to be two years older than myself. His face was dirty and so were the jersey and trousers he wore. I thought that I had never seen such a dirty cap and jersey. His hair, though, was slicked back from the forehead with a sweet-smelling brilliantine. As we entered, he laid down the book he had been reading, took a pipe from between his teeth, and looked towards us inquiringly.

"This is Grant, the new apprentice, Tramer," said Burns, by way of introduction.

Tramer nodded, shrugging his shoulders with scorn, and picking up his book, resumed his reading.

"Hullo," said I.

He ignored me. I turned to Burns.

"Never mind him, Tommy," said he, with a laugh. "He just can't help himself." In a stage whisper he went on: "You see, he's from the south of Ireland, where they have no schools. The children run about in the fields with the cattle an' at night sleep under the beds with the pigs. Without education, they are without manners. It's a pity on them. Pay no attention to him," he nodded towards Tramer. "After a while you'll get used to him." He laid a hand on the starboard bunk board. "This will be your side of the cabin but, being the junior, you'll have to keep it all clean. Stow your gear away in the drawers, change into your working uniform, then come in next door. Hall is berthed with me. He's senior to Tramer an' a likeable chap like myself." He laughed again and went out.



JOHN TRAMER

Opening my sea bag and portmanteau, I emptied them and filled the drawers, after chasing innumerable brown insects, each more than an inch long, into the structure behind. Then I changed from my brass-bound uniform into a pair of blue trousers and a jersey, wondering all the while what I would be given to do. As I was about to leave the cabin, Tramer spoke.

"Did you bring any food with you?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Why?"

"You'll starve, then," he stated, with a sniff of contempt.

"I thought that we had our meals in the mess room. The superintendent told me so."

"We do, such as they are. The food's not fit for pigs."

"You don't seem to be fading away," I ventured.

His lips curled with anger. He nodded towards the door.



"Get out!" he shouted.

A fight seemed imminent so I retreated and, taking a few paces along the deck, knocked at the next door. Burns shouted for me to enter and forget the ceremony. He was sitting on a bunk with his legs dangling over the board. Inclining his head towards a tall chap sitting on the settee, he said:

"Tommy—by the way I'm going to call you that, for all nice-looking boys are known as Tommy at sea—meet Percy Hall, the brains of the half deck. He'll help you with your studies while I get you into mischief."

The tall chap rose and we shook hands. He had a pleasant and intelligent face.

Laughingly he said: "Don't listen to Bruce. He can lick us all, not only in our studies but with his fists." He laughed again and asked: "Did you bring any tucker along?"

"No. I didn't think I . . ."

With a gesture of his hand he waved me to silence.

"That's all right. You'll know next time. When you write home, tell them to send along a hamper of food once in a while. We all do. The sea puts an edge on an appetite. You'll be hanging around the galley for scraps before a week is out . . . unless you're seasick."



PERCY HALL

"Never mind about the seasickness," Burns said, making a place for me on the bunk beside him. "What's more important is . . . How much money have you got?"

Putting a hand into my pocket, I drew out what change I had, dropping it on to the bunk. All told, there was seven shillings.

Shutting his eyes, Burns leaned back against the bulkhead, his brows furrowed with thought. After a while he sat up.

"Seven shillings will buy six suppers of ham and eggs," he stated. "One for each of

us to-night and one for you and me to-morrow, Tommy. How about that?"

I laughed in acquiescence. It was going to be easy to get along with Burns. I felt as though I had been at sea with him for along, long time.

"Bully, boy!" exclaimed Burns. "And now that that's settled, tell me—did you get squared up next door?"

I nodded. "But I don't quite like the bugs that run about all over the place. They give me the creeps."

"Don't worry about them. They're just some of our pet cockroaches. Every 'tramp' is full of them and they're supposed to keep down bugs. I'd advise you, though, to sleep with your mouth shut, for they've the devilish habit of explorin' in dark places. If, by any chance, one does get in unawares, try not to sink your teeth into it. If the Old Man hears, he'll cut down your rations of fresh meat. He has issued orders that every cockroach must be caught and given to the cook, who uses them instead of currants in the plum duff on Sundays. They're juicy and have a flavour all their own. You'll like them."

I shuddered, my stomach wobbling a little in its moorings.

"I don't believe you," I managed to say.

"Wait and see, Tommy-boy," returned Burns. "Isn't it so, Percy?"

Percy nodded, a twinkle in his eyes and, rising from the settee, looked at a watch which was hanging from a hook at the head of his bunk.

"We'd better go and have some now, with our breakfast," he suggested. "It'll be two bells soon and we'll have to turn to."

## CHAPTER II

### A FIGHT UNDER THE POOP

INSTEAD of diminishing under the duress of my ignorance the glamour of a nautical life grew infinitely brighter as I strove, amid swirling coal dust and moist skies, to learn the business of a seaman and thereby gain the good graces of the mate. From dawn to dusk I followed, like an obedient dog, at the heels of Burns, who, being the senior, directed our energies so that they could be expended to the best advantage. We tended the moorings, shifting the vessel beneath the tip down which poured the cargo of coal in an incessant, rumbling stream; we battened and unbattened hatches until my back seemed about to break under the weight of the wooden covers which grew singularly heavier as the day progressed; hoisting a derrick, with a steam winch, we heaved the sea stores on board, stowing them away in peaks and storerooms, occasionally filching a titbit to stay the hunger that gnawed at our innards; and when there seemed nothing else of importance to do, we "knocked off", as Burns remarked, and polished the brass binnacles and telegraphs upon the bridge against the day on which the vessel would put to sea.

At last came the time when the cargo was all below hatches and the bunkers filled flush with the coamings. In a bitterly cold dawn the *Monarch*, listing slightly to port, was towed by two buff-funnelled tugs from under the tips to the pierheads, where her bluff bow was made fast to the quay wall in readiness for departure when the tide was at full flood. The decks were washed down, and the cargo gear lowered from aloft and stowed away, and the mate, in a burst of kindness, gave us each a shilling with which to buy a farewell breakfast in the restaurant near the dock entrance.

After breakfast the crew came on board, straggling

one after the other, with their sea bags on their shoulders and their "donkeys'-breakfasts", on which they slept, under their arms. Most of them were a little drunk and swore, or sang, as they staggered up the long rung ladder and stumbled over the rails on to the forecastle head. The Chinese, who worked in the stokehold and engine-room, were suspicious-eyed, slinking on board like whipped curs. They seldom spoke. On reaching the deck, they hastened to their quarters under the forecastle head as though glad to be on board and, for the time, freed from the menace of the land.

"They're not dangerous, are they?" I asked Burns, who was whipping the ends of a heaving line at the lamp-room door.

"As docile as lambs, Tommy, an' always sober," he told me. "Give them a kind look an' they'll eat out of your hand. I wish we had a full crew of them."

I was relieved. Having never seen a Chinaman until that moment, I had gathered from pictures that they were ferocious and treacherous. I was to learn later that, under provocation, they were both and, in addition, murderous.

Then in the quiet of a June evening in 1912 the dock gates were cleared and the *Monarch*, outward bound for Iquique with coal, bowed gently to a ground swell as she steamed down the Bristol Channel towards a lemon-coloured sunset above which a star twinkled in solitary grandeur.

"It's the eye o' the night," a sailorman told me, as he walked aft along the deck.

I nodded absent-mindedly. Resting on the shovel with which I had been dumping garbage through a bell pipe, I watched it, wondering if it was an omen of good luck for me, and concluding that it was, I turned around and watched the land recede over the stern like a great cloud upon the horizon. A song was in my heart, for now I knew that no matter what opinion the mate might have of my abilities, I could not be packed off to Glasgow until the voyage was completed, and ere that should come about I had resolved to have proven my mettle. A fierce



ambition possessed me. I wanted to remain at sea. The dirt and hard labour of port had, very strangely, attracted me. The food, about which Tramer growled incessantly, was plain and wholesome, and not even the cockroaches, which appeared in it frequently, could dull the edge of my appetite for it. I ate them with relish, knowing that, once cooked, they were palatable morsels and could not harm me.

The fine weather, holding for a few days, put sea legs under me, and as the vessel approached the tropics I felt that I had escaped being seasick. I assumed the rolling gait of an old-timer.

One morning after breakfast, Burns came to where I was lying reading on Number Three hatch and said :

"The Old Man wants the key of the keelson, Tommy. Nip down below and get it from the fourth engineer and take it up on the bridge to him."

I ran to obey with alacrity. The engine-room was frightfully hot and the handrails burned my palms as I descended the iron ladders. I didn't quite like the hiss of the steam from a pump or the clang of the bottom ends as they swung over and over in the pits, but I was encouraged, for the opportunity had come for me to meet the captain, whom I had seen only at a distance. I wanted to impress him now with my efficiency.

The fourth engineer was standing on the bottom platform, near the stop valve, wiping his hands on a piece of cotton waste when I slid over the greasy floor plates to his side.

"Hullo," said he, shaking the sweat from his brow.

"I want the key of the keelson for the captain," I shouted, endeavouring to raise my voice above the noise.

"The what?" he demanded, cupping a hand around his ear.

"The key of the keelson," I reiterated. "It's for the captain."

"Oh, yes," said he, pursing his lips and nodding his head very wisely.

Selecting a small wrench from a clutter of tools on a bench, he walked over to the stokehold bulkhead and



loosened the nut from a bolt which held a very large spanner in place. Gently he freed it from the bulkhead and eased it to the deck.

"Do you think you can manage it?" he asked, eyeing me up and down.

"Yes . . . yes . . . certainly," I cried, not sure that I could, yet afraid he might order one of his men to assist me.

"All right, then. But watch your feet on the plates. They're slippery. Here you are!"

He lifted the spanner and placed it on my shoulder. I sagged under its weight and, staggering to the ladder, began the ascent. The sweat came out on my brow . . . ran into my eyes. My legs wobbled at the knees, but gritting my teeth and clutching the hot handrails, I managed somehow to reach the deck, where the cool wind, striking my face, acted as a scourge to my ebbing strength.

The captain, a stocky-built man with a grey pointed beard and humorous, pale-blue eyes, was on the lower bridge, pacing up and down smoking a cigar, when I staggered up the ladder and approached him. He halted in his strides, blowing a cloud of smoke from his mouth. His bright eyes grew infinitely brighter. Taking a handkerchief from the breast pocket of his uniform jacket, he blew his nose violently.

"T—t—the key of the k—k—keelson, sir," I reported, and was about to lay it on the bridge planking, when he motioned me to retain it on my shoulder.

"I dinna want it here, laddie," said he kindly. "Tak' it to Mr. Boxley. I believe ye'll find him in his cabin."

"Y—yes, sir."

As I descended the ladder to the bridge deck again, I believe that I heard him chuckle. With a sinking heart I



THE CAPTAIN

staggered on, conscious that the eyes of all hands were on me.

The mate opened the door of his cabin in answer to my knock. He was in his shirt sleeves. Evidently he had been lying on the settee, reading. He puffed out his cheeks and blew out a gust of wind from between compressed lips.

"What's all this?" he demanded.

"T—the captain told me to bring this spanner to you, sir," I stammered.

"Damn' foolishness!" he bawled. His head shot out towards me. "Who told you to get it in the first place?" he asked.

I opened my lips to tell him, but intuitively it struck me that I was the victim of a hoax and that if I mentioned Burns as being the culprit, he would most probably receive a reprimand, if not corporal punishment.

"No one, sir," I lied.

His face came close to mine. His breath fell hot on my cheek.

"You're lying, boy!" he bellowed.

"N—n—no, sir," I insisted weakly, backing away.

Sniffing derisively, he reached up, grabbing my left ear. Dodging away, the weight of the spanner on my shoulder threw me off balance. I tried to recover an even keel, but my legs, tired under the strain, gave way at the knees. The spanner crashed to the deck with a resonant clatter. In the nick of time, we both jumped clear.

"So that's what your up to!" he shouted, cuffing me on the side of the head. "First you lie; then you try to crush my toes!"

I backed away. He came on. He grasped me by the arm and, throwing open the door of the port half deck, he pointed to the deck, his finger shaking with wrath.

"D'you see that?" he demanded, and went on before I could speak: "It would suit you better to get that mess cleaned up instead of acting the fool on a Sunday morning. The Old Man will be around on inspection within the hour. If this cabin isn't shipshape, by the Lord Harry I'll tan your hide!"

He cuffed me again and, turning away, ordered a sailor-man, who had been a grinning spectator to the incident, to take the spanner "down below where it belongs".

I stood at the half deck door looking in, a prey to conflicting emotions which anchored my tongue, so that, for the moment, speech would not come. Strewn upon the floor were burnt matches, tobacco ashes, and pieces of cotton waste, and only an hour before I had swept it clean, knowing that the captain would be making his regular inspection. On the bunk, reading and smoking, lay Tramer, pretending to be unaware of my presence. Surely he couldn't have deliberately littered the floor? It would be like him, though, I thought. I asked him.

He glanced over the top of his book, his black eyes insolently narrowed, the pipe moving around between his teeth.

"What d'you want to know for?" he demanded. "It's your duty to clean it up, anyway."

I stepped into the half deck closing the door.

"Did you do it?" I shouted.

"Get away an' don't bother me," he returned, twisting around on his elbow. "Can't you see I'm reading?"

Grabbing his right ankle, I pressed it over the bunk board, compelling his attention.

"Did you?" I demanded, a sullen anger stiffening my jaw.

Jerking his leg suddenly, he sent me crashing against the wardrobe with a foot in the pit of my stomach. Pausing but a second to recover my breath, I leaped on to the bunk on top of him, raining blows on his face. He punched back viciously. We rolled over. We fell to the deck, our heels beating a rat-a-tat on the polished mahogany as our legs flung through the air.

He was much taller and stronger than I, but in the narrow cabin he could not make full use of these advantages, although it wasn't very long before I realized that I was in for a good licking. But, at the instant of realization, the door handle rattled, the sunlight streamed in, and the mate stood framed in the doorway.

"What's this?" he bellowed.



Tramer and I scrambled to our feet, clothing dishevelled, and looked sheepishly at him.

"What! Have you lost your tongue?" he asked, a smile passing over his eyes.

"It . . . it's nothing, sir," I gasped.

"Hmm!" he snorted, facing me. "Nothing, eh? Look at yourself! D'you call that nothing?" With the back of his hand he indicated the scratched mahogany. His voice moderated as he went on: "You're a fighter, eh! Going to have no fights on this ship, if I know anything about it . . . at least, not after to-day. We'll settle this once and for all. At noon you two will meet under the poop. I'll be there to see fair play . . . and to sweep up the remains of one or the other of you. D'you understand?"

We nodded our heads.

"Good!" he muttered, chuckling, and, stepping over the washboard, closed the door with a bang.

I glowered at Tramer. He grasped me by the shirt, close under the neck.

"It's all your fault," he sneered.

"It's not!" I shouted back. "It's yours!"

"It's not! I've a good mind to wipe the deck with you."

"Go on! I dare you to!" I challenged, squaring away.

"I will . . . later."

He released his hold of my shirt and, sniffing down his nose, left the half deck, dragging his feet with slow and insolent steps. I slumped down on to the settee, dejected by the catastrophe which had so swiftly overtaken me. Without a doubt, in the wide freedom of the space under the poop, I would be beaten to a pulp, my eyes blackened, my nose broken. There would be no escape now. Of that I was sure. Not that I wanted one, but it did seem a pity to have one's face disfigured on the first Sunday at sea. I touched my cheeks with a quivering hand. A shiver passed down the length of my spine.

Listlessly I rose from the settee to tidy up the half deck when the door opened and Burns came in. Vaulting on to Tramer's bunk, he stretched out at his ease, a grin on his russet-brown face.

"I hear, Tommy, that thou hast aspirations to be the light-weight champion of the good ship *Monarch*. Rumour hath it that articles have been signed for a ten-round bout at noon. Admission one bar of soap. How d'you feel?"

"Bally rotten," I moaned.

"Not so good. He who wouldst—that's twistin' on the tongue, but being Sunday I must respect the day—wouldst fight, should be all keyed up . . . muscles twitch-twitchin' an' all that kind of thing. Later, after the affair, you can feel as rotten as you please. Mebbe you will . . . mebbe you will." He whistled "See the Conquering Hero Comes" with great gusto, and when he had finished he asked :

"Have you ever fought before, Tommy?"

"No, never."

"That's bad."

With a little sigh he shut his eyes, turned his face towards the deck head, raised his knees until his hands clapped around them, and rocked gently to the slight motion of the vessel. I swept the floor, then sat back on the settee, striving, through the dim mists of memory, to recall some boxing instructions I had read in a magazine. Feint with the left. Drive with the right. It sounded all right, but how was it done? Closing my eyes, I imagined myself in a ring, fighting against fearful odds. Biff! Bang! Wallop!

"I've got it, Tommy!"

I came back to myself. Burns was sitting up on the bunk and leaning eagerly towards me.

"Tramer's heavier and got a much longer reach than you. Therefore you must get in close to him right away," he said.

"Hm," I mumbled without enthusiasm. I had thought of that. But how was it to be done?

Burns went on: "Bury a left hook in his stomach and, when his head falls forward, biff him one with your right, full on the point of the chin, an' it'll be all over. Perfectly simple, Tommy."

"Hm!" I mumbled again. Perfectly simple! Tramer

would have his guard open to receive the blows, I thought cynically.

"Do you think I could manage it?" I asked, seeking encouragement.

"I'm sure of it," Burns stated emphatically. "The element of surprise. That's what'll do the trick. Remember, too, that if he beats you, he'll lick you every day of the voyage just for the fun of it. He's like that. An amiable cuss!"

I had thought of all that too. I glanced at the watch on the bulkhead. It was almost eleven. One more hour. A cold perspiration moistened my brow. I breathed deeply. I rose to my feet and walked towards the door.

"I . . . I'm going out for a breath of air," I said.

"Right-o, Tommy-boy. Take all the air you can. You'll need it. But don't get downhearted. Remember, I'll be on hand to carry home your aching bones."

"Oh! Rats!" I retorted.

Laughing, he rolled over on the bunk and pretended to be asleep as I passed out on to the deck.

The sea was flat calm, with a slight swell creeping in from the eastward, making the vessel roll ever so gently. Leaning on the bulwark rail, I looked forward along the run, watching the blue water turn to iridescent foam as it fell away from the hull with a sibilant swish. A Portuguese man-of-war drifted past, delicately pink in the bright sunlight. I wondered if I should ever be able to see them again or would my eyes be for ever closed? Involuntarily my fingers caressed my face, which was moist with perspiration.

The moments were so quiet, and I so troubled, that I thought I was forsaken by everyone, until a hand fell upon my arm, feeling the biceps. With a start, I looked round into the tired eyes of Mr. Selkirk, the old second mate, and laughed nervously with relief, for his face, etched and seamed as if by some woeful tragedy which aged him beyond his years, was lighted up with a smile.

"Ye'll be eager for the fight, son," he remarked, nodding his head inanely. "It minds me o' the time when I



was young an' fightin' strong like you. I was a fighter then!" The ancient eyes gleamed and he made a valiant effort to straighten his rounded shoulders. "Ye had to be or ye went under," he went on, sighing. "Nothin' like a fight to stir up the blood. A clean fight, I mean, wi' all hands a-lookin' on."

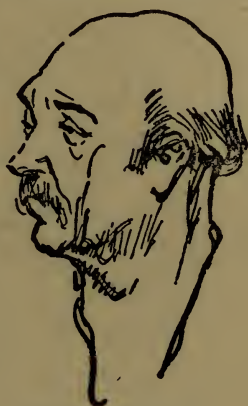
"All hands won't be out to-day?" I asked with consternation.

"They will that, son. A' that can be there. It's Sunday, ye see, an' there's no muckle o' excitement these days on the sea. I'm sorry I'll no be there. I've got to be takin' a sight wi' the Old Man. But I'll be listenin' wi' an ear cocked aft an' thinkin' aboot ye, lad. Mebbe I'll be wishin' I could be in your shoes. Guid luck be with ye."

Winking very deliberately, he squeezed my biceps again and walked off in the direction of the bridge, his head nodding as though loose on his neck. I saw the boatswain approaching with a grin on his sea-seamed Irish face and, not wishing to hear what he had to say, I dodged around the corner

of the deckhouse, and, entering the bathroom, I locked the door quickly behind me. With all hands as spectators, something had to be done. Taking off my jacket, I rolled up my sleeves and squared away at an imaginary foe.

A hook with the left! With all my might I delivered the blow, nearly falling into the bathtub. Back into position. Again the left hook. Balance maintained. A dozen times the left hook, until my shoulder ached with the force of the swing. Deep breaths. Legs flexed at the knees. On guard. An uppercut with the right. Not enough weight under it. Ough! Knuckles against the washbasin, drawing blood. A knockout blow, though. Hanging my jacket on the door ventilator, I attacked it. Left hook . . . right uppercut. Left . . . right . . . left



MR. SELKIRK,  
SECOND MATE

. . . right. The sweat ran down my face, into my eyes and mouth. I brushed it away and fought on until, on the stroke of twelve, my arms were working automatically . . . left . . . right . . . left . . . right.

Dousing my face in a basin of cold water, I wiped it dry; then, donning my jacket, I opened the door and reached the deck with my heart pounding like a sledge hammer. Burns met me at the after end of the bridge deck.

"All hands are aft, Tommy, waitin' to see the fun," he remarked, linking his arm through mine. "I thought for a minute that you were in a funk and hidin' away."

"N—no," I stammered. "Nothing like that."

The sun was warm and held a friendly glow as we passed along the after well deck. I wondered how it would appear to me when the fight was over. I didn't want to fight. It didn't seem to be quite right. Remorsefully I realized that it was of my own



THE BO'SUN

seeking.

A ring had been formed by lashing a rope to the four stanchions supporting the corners of the poop hatch and, inside it, the sunbeams resting like a spotlight on his face, which was broadened with a devilish grimace, stood Mr. Boxley, his jacket discarded, revealing a dirty waistcoat, and his sleeves rolled up. Outside the ring lounged the sailormen who were not on duty, all dressed in their bleached and patched Sunday dungarees.

"Come on, m' lad," shouted Mr. Boxley, sighting me at the poop entrance. "What d'you think this is . . . a picnic?" He glared around and asked: "Where's Tramer? That fellow's always behind, like a cow's tail." The sailormen shrugged their shoulders and looked at each other. Mr. Boxley bawled: "Sink your lousy souls!

Find him!" Hall and the boatswain left the poop as Burns helped me off with my jacket.

"Don't lose your head, Tommy, an' go chasin' around looking for it," he advised. "Smart's the work an' smart's the action. The best of luck, Tommy-boy."

He squeezed my hand. I bent down under the rope and entered the ring to the accompaniment of a cheer from the sailormen. Mr. Boxley moved from beneath the sunbeams, eyed my body, then shook his head as though in sorrow for me. I wilted under his scrutiny, sensing his pity. A shiver of apprehension attacked my spine. I wished that Tramer would come, to get done with the fight.

As though in answer to my wish, he entered the poop, hands in his pockets and slouching along with an insolent gait. His lips curled with contempt. He slipped out of his jacket, handed it to the boatswain, and ducked into the ring, the muscles of his shoulders and arms working like knotted rope on a pulley.

Mr. Boxley stepped between us, clapping his hands for silence.

"It's a fight to a finish, boys," he stated. "I'm here to see fair play."

He hopped to one side, stumbling over the edge of a deck plate. I took a few steps towards Tramer. The sailormen, led by Burns, gave a cheer. Tramer hung back, his dark eyes flashing angrily at those around him. Recklessness sprang into my heart.

"Scared?" I taunted.

His gaze came back to me. He clenched his hands and, swinging back his arms, flung forward. Closing my eyes, I ducked . . . leaped towards him. Left . . . my fist struck soft flesh . . . right . . . my knuckles, with a sharp crack, hit bone. A wave of triumph surged through me. Left . . . right . . . rang through my head. A sharp yelp of pain compelled my eyes to open. I staggered back. Fear clutched like a vice upon my heart. Tramer's face was ghastly pale as he fell backwards to the deck. He didn't crumble as he went down. He fell rigid, as a tree falls, his head striking against the sharp edges of a deck plate with a dull thud. He lay still, like a corpse.

"Oh!" I gasped. I hastened towards where he lay. Mr. Boxley knocked me to one side with his fist.

"Get back!" he bellowed. "You've done enough damage already."

I slunk back against the rope, unable quite to comprehend what I had done. If I had killed him, what then? Surely they wouldn't blame me? My thoughts became a whirling maelstrom, dragging me down in despair.

The boatswain brought a bucket of water. Mr. Boxley took it and threw the water on Tramer's face. The eyes flickered . . . opened with a glassy stare. Mr. Boxley laughed and, looking back over his shoulder, shouted:

"Why didn't you tell me you are a fighter?"

"I . . . I'm not, sir," I protested.

He laughed again and bent over Tramer. Burns came over beside me, placing an arm affectionately around my shoulders.

"Cheer up, Tommy," said he. "Tramer's not dead. Just havin' a nap. He is rather fond of his bunk . . . like his sleep." He helped me with my jacket. "My! But that was a beauty!" he acclaimed. "He won't forget it for many a day and the queer part of it is, you'll be the best of friends. The Irish are like that. They love a fighter, even when the fighter beats them."

And it was as he said, Tramer and I were the best of friends until he was lost at sea.



### CHAPTER III

#### FATHER NEPTUNE PAYS A CALL

IT was a beautiful afternoon, filled with a slumberous peace. The vessel, a white ruffle at her bow, forged her way to the southward with a steady throb of her powerful engines. The sun, receding from the zenith, made dazzling jewels on the smooth blue of the sea. The north-east trade wind tempered the waves of heat which rose as translucent vapour from the steel decks.

Upon the boat deck awning two sailormen were chipping the rust from a steam-pipe casing, disturbing the serenity of the afternoon with the clap-clap of their hammers. Mr. Selkirk, on watch upon the bridge, paced back and forth, the collar of his white patrol jacket open, revealing his hairy chest above his singlet. Occasionally he would halt, straighten his back, and gaze off towards the horizon with a slow turn of his head ; then, sighing wearily, he would resume his pacing, with all the cares of the world upon his rounded shoulders. A Chinese fireman, in the stokehold, rattled a hammer on the floor plates and made weird noises deep down in his throat. Ah Tie, the cook, sat on the galley doorstep, peeling potatoes, occasionally eating a piece of skin which, I had been told, the Chinese chewed instead of tobacco. Burns sat on the end of the cross-bunker hatch, which is immediately abaft the bridge, repairing an awning which had been torn by a sudden squall the night before. I lay on the hatch behind him, waiting impatiently for the moment when he would teach me to use the palm and needle which he handled so dexterously.

"Do you realize, Tommy, that you've been on board three weeks," he said, without looking up from his work, "an' that the ship will be on the equator to-morrow?"

I nodded. I had not realized it. Time had flown

swiftly. With so much to see and learn, I had lost all track of the days.

"You like the sea, don't you?"

I nodded again. I did like the sea. I liked also the boy beside whom I lay. The humorous twitching of his mouth, no matter how irksome conditions became. The changing moods of his eyes. The power in the sun-bronzed hands which seemed so awkward until, with a needle between the fingers, they surprise you with their suppleness. The inherent honesty of his face. He and the sea were inseparable in my thoughts.

"You'll be getting initiated," he stated, glancing covertly over his shoulder.

"Into what?" I inquired.

He did not answer immediately but gave all his attention to the awning. Whispers were flying around the vessel about certain rites to be performed on the morrow but about which I could elicit no information, although I knew preparations were being made.

"Into what?" I demanded, grasping his arm so that he could not ply the needle.

He measured a length of twine from the ball, cut it, re-threaded the needle, screwing up his face to smother a grin, I thought, and, looking down at me, said:

"Into the Brotherhood of the Sea. You know, you aren't a real, honest-t'-goodness sailor until you've been around the Horn a couple of times, can spit to windward on a breezy day without it blowin' back on to your face, and have met Father Neptune." He chuckled and resumed his work.

"But I can steer," I boasted. "The mate put me on watch to-day. I can make all the knots, fancy ones too, and turn a splice as quickly as Reggie. And before we reach port, I'll know all the rules of the road by heart."

"You're pickin' things up fast, I know," he admitted, "but that doesn't make you a sailor. You must be initiated. Like joinin' the Masons. Ridin' the goat an' all that sort of thing." He sucked his thumb where the needle had pricked it. "You've just got to be initiated and that's all there is about it," he said, with finality.



I moved closer to him, looked up into his face.

"What happens?" I asked.

He laughed again and said: "You'll know soon enough, Tommy. Perhaps you'll wish, before they're finished, that you had never come to sea. They are a bit rough at times, especially when they dig the tridents into your shoulder to draw off a cupful of your blood for the Old Boy to drink. He's a thirsty old josser, what with livin' in the salt water most of the time an' eatin' seaweed and chewin' drowned sailors' bones."

"You're kidding," I scoffed. "They don't do that!"

"Don't they? Just you wait an' see. They left this on me."

He laid down his palm and needle. He unbuttoned his shirt at the neck, pulled it down over his left shoulder, and pointed to a scar around which there was an inflamed swelling.

"Three years ago I received it and, as you see, it hasn't quite healed up. Some strange poison from Davy Jones's locker in it."

I shuddered and, rolling over on my stomach, gazed across the bulwark rail towards the soft clouds which lay close upon the horizon like the sails of vessels hull down. It couldn't be true what he told me, I argued within myself. Yet, again, it might. Strange rites were performed out of the sight of land and out of the reach of authority. Hadn't Pat Greenaway, the boatswain, after breakfast that morning, whispered in my ear: "Be after takin' a bath th' day, young fellow m' lad, for ould Neptune loikes them clane an' cool, loike the Shamrocks o' Kil-larney." And even old Davy, the lamp trimmer, who never cracked a smile, he was that old, had taken me by the arm into a corner and said: "He'll be likin' y'r blue eyes, sonny, f'r they're soft like a girl's."

All the crew were in league with Father Neptune. There could be no escape. I shivered, though the day was warm. Then it occurred to me that possibly the captain wouldn't permit any atrocity to my person. I would keep close to him. But how? That was the rub!

"Where does the initiation take place?" I asked.

"Usually on the forrard well. The Old Boy an' his retinue come over the fo'c'sle head. Up the anchor cables. But anywhere that's handy," he concluded airily.

"Never on the bridge?"

"Hmmm . . . no."

I rose to my feet and jumped from the hatch to the deck. Burns rested from his labours, patted the canvas over his knees, and looked up.

"Where are you goin', Tommy?"

"Nowhere in particular," I lied. "I'll be right back."

"I'll show you how to use this palm an' needle now."

The temptation was strong to remain, but the urge of self-preservation was stronger. Plans to outwit Father Neptune must be laid immediately.

"I . . . I'll be right back," I said again and, swinging on my heels, I ran up the ladder to the bridge before he could delay me any longer.

Mr. Selkirk was lolling over the weather cloth on the starboard wing, smoking a well-seasoned clay. Timidly I approached, coughing to attract his attention. Guiltily he slipped the pipe into his pocket. But his tired grey eyes brightened into a smile when, glancing over his shoulder, he perceived me.

"Hullo, son," he said. "I thought you was the Old Man."

"C—can I ask you a question, sir?" I stammered, touching the skip of my deep-sea cap with a respectful finger.

He straightened up, spat into the sea, and faced around so slowly that I thought his bones creaked.

"Ye can that, son. What'll it be?"

"Is it . . ." I hesitated, a little afraid of the ridicule that might come into his eyes when he heard my query. I grasped the bull by the horns. "Is it true that Father Neptune is coming on board to-morrow?" I blurted out.

"It is!" he asserted, nodding his head wisely. "He'll be here, I'm thinkin' . . . let me see . . ." He squinted towards the sun with his head cocked to one side, then he gazed off towards the horizon. He concluded: "He'll be steppin' aboard at five bells in the afternoon."

I thanked him and hastened away, my heart sinking into my boots, for it seemed inevitable that I should meet the fate which lurked in the wake of the fast-travelling sun.

On my return to the hatch Burns relinquished his place to me and, with a patience inconceivable, instructed me in the art of the palm and needle. I was a poor pupil. My fingers, fumbling stupidly, were all thumbs, for in no way were they connected with my thoughts which had focused on five bells in the afternoon.

All night, on a restless bunk, I lay awake, tossing fitfully and listening to the bells which counted off the flight of time all too swiftly. It was a relief to go on watch at eight bells—four in the morning—and to see the stars being effaced by the light of day. But the relief was of short duration, for every time the mate approached as he paced the bridge, he chuckled so that I could hear, and I believed that he had an inkling of what was to take place.

At the wheel, from six to eight, an idea struck me with considerable force. The more I mulled over it, the better it seemed.

"What are you grinning at?" Mr. Boxley demanded, stepping into the wheelhouse and looking at the compass to see if I was on my course. I was, within a degree.

I didn't know I had been grinning. I told him so.

"You didn't know, eh?" he snorted. "A sign of insanity! That's what it is. I've been wondering what was the matter with you."

The sarcasm fell on the empty air. For the moment I was too happy to give it any attention. I only wanted the watch to pass quickly so that I could execute the plan I had in mind.

Tramer was in the half deck, dressing for breakfast and growling as usual, because he had to get up, when I opened the door, and, hooking it back against the bulk-head, sat down on the step.

"The graveyard watch *is* a rotten one," I conceded, for that was his watch.

Rubbing his sleepy eyes with the back of his hand, he sat back on the settee, blinking fiercely at me.



"Don't know why the mate didn't give it to you," he grumbled. "You're a first voyager!"

"I wish that he had. I like the middle of the night."

He shot a suspicious glance at me, as though I had taken leave of my senses, but apparently satisfied that I was in my right mind, he bent down to lace his boots.

"I tell you what I'll do, John," said I, leaning forward. "I'll take your afternoon wheel to-day for you. I couldn't keep her on her course this morning and the mate was in, raising the dickens. I want to get some practice. You could have a sleep."

"D'you mean it?"

"Sure!"

"The mate would be mad as a hatter if he knew. I'd better take it myself."

"He'll never know. He'll be asleep too."

"Yes. That's right!" He thought for a moment. I waited anxiously, afraid he would not agree.

"All right, Tommy. Thanks," he agreed eagerly. "And I tell you what I'll do. I'll clean out the half deck for you this morning."

At four bells in the afternoon I went upon the bridge and relieved the man at the wheel. The captain was lying down, his door on the hook. He would never know. Mr. Selkirk checked the course by the standard compass on "monkey island" and, descending to the bridge again, entered the wheelhouse.

"How'd . . ." He had been on the point of asking me on what degree she had steadied by the wheelhouse compass, but he changed his mind and inquired, "Where's Tramer?"

"He's not feeling very well, sir. A touch of fever," I lied glibly. "I'm taking the wheel until he's better."

The second mate stood in the doorway a moment and stroked his blue chin. "Hmm," he muttered. He walked on to the wing of the bridge and, leaning on the rail, looked down towards the forward well.

I didn't quite like the way he said "Hmm", or the amused grin on his face, or the interest he was taking in

something which I could not see. He spoke to someone, too, in a low voice.

Half an hour passed. He had apparently forgotten me. I left the wheel by the starboard door and struck five bells on the bell suspended from a bracket on the forward bulkhead of the wheelhouse. Returning by the port door, I stood for a moment rooted to a spot. A procession was moving along the lower deck towards the bridge. Quick as a wink I regained my position behind the wheel, ears alert to sounds from below.

The procession ascended the ladder to the bridge and halted, after much shuffling, outside the door of the captain's cabin. Burns was the leader. On his head was an aluminium-coloured crown which had been shaped from an old soup-and-bouillon can, and from under it and from his upper lip and chin hung a thick mass of teased rope yarns. Draped from his shoulders was a cloak of coloured bunting. A strip of green-painted canvas covered his chest and waist. He carried a sceptre, mounted with the tail of a shark, in the crook of his right arm. Behind him were four others, somewhat similarly clad. At a signal from Burns, they all knocked upon the bridge planking.

Captain McFarlane's cabin door opened and he stepped on to the bridge, buttoning his white uniform jacket across his chest. A chuckle shook his shoulders.

"All hail! All hail!" sang out the men in chorus, saluting with the weapons they carried.

"Hail! Father Neptune!" answered Captain McFarlane, raising his right hand. "Can I be helpin' ye?"

Father Neptune raised his sceptre level with his eyes. He spoke:

"We have come from the darkneses of the mighty deep, for it was brought to our notice by the fishes that there is one on board your vessel who has not been duly initiated into the mysteries of the Great Waters. We beg your most gracious permission to perform the ancient and honourable ceremonies. With me I have Old Sawbones, my physician, who, with calipers and hammers, the working tools of his profession, will sound the depth of this person to find if he is worthy."

Old Sawbones, otherwise the boatswain, moved forward, the bones, on a cord around his waist, banging together. He raised a hammer above his head and shouted :

“Respects, surr !”

Father Neptune went on :

“Behind him, Gifted Navigator, you see Sharks’-tooth, the court dentist, who, with mallet and spike, will replace the teeth dislodged during the initiation, and behind him is Latherup, the barber, who can shave the gossip from a gabbling tongue. Every emergency, sir, has been foreseen. Have we your permission to proceed ?”

Captain McFarlane cleared his throat.

“Ye have that,” he said.

“I thank you,” Father Neptune answered, in a resonant voice. He pointed his sceptre at me and shouted : “Seize the wily one !”

Two of the bodyguard, dressed in grotesque costumes of green-painted canvas to which were fastened pot lids, and armed with wooden swords, hastened towards the ladder leading up to the flying bridge where I stood, peering around the wheelhouse door. Wild terror gripped me. I ran from the starboard door, leaving the wheel, to escape down the ladder on that side. Mr. Boxley, ascending, blocked the way.

“What’s this ? What’s this ?” he demanded in stentorian tones, grabbing me by the scruff of the neck. “Deserting the wheel, eh ? Another offence !” He turned me over to the bodyguard, saying : “Rub it in. Or, by the Lord Harry, I’ll take a hand in the game myself.”

They dragged me, kicking and fighting, from the bridge. They hoisted me on to a platform which had been erected on Number Two hatch beside a canvas tank of water and, stripping me naked except for my trousers, sat me on a box, a guard on each side and Father Neptune facing me. Old Sawbones approached, his calipers extended.

“Display your tongue,” ordered Father Neptune.

Reluctantly I thrust the tip of it from between my compressed lips. Old Sawbones caught it with the calipers.





TAR AND SUDS FILLED MY MOUTH



"Is there any reason why we should not cleanse you?" asked Father Neptune.

"Ye . . . ye . . ." My lips parted. Latherup plastered soapsuds on my tongue.

"The reason?" demanded Father Neptune.

I kept my mouth tightly closed. I shrank away.

"The reason? Answer!"

"I . . . I . . ."

Tar and suds filled my mouth. I spluttered and choked, struggling fiercely to dodge the brush that was covering my body with Stockholm tar. Suddenly a voice cried:

"Enough, m' hearties! Dump him into the sea!"

Rough hands grabbed me, swung me back and forth. For a moment I thought they were about to throw me over the bulwark rail. I kicked and fought. Someone fell back with a scream of pain. Through the stillness that followed, Mr. Boxley shouted:

"Take the fight out of him. Give him some more of the tar. It'll tan his hide an' spoil his beauty."

They put me back on the box.

"Blimey! 'e's 'ad enough," a sailorman muttered, then added, in an excited voice: "'Oly jumpin' Joseph! 'e's a-comin' to take a 'and in the gime 'imself!"

Glancing fearfully around, I saw the mate come down the ladder from the bridge deck, rolling up the sleeves of his uniform jacket as he stepped on to the hatch. He was swaggering proudly, his eyes eager for action.

"Give me the brush," he shouted brusquely.

Latherup gave it to him, reluctantly, I thought. I struggled again. The sailormen released their grip on me arms. As Mr. Boxley approached, I slid on to my knees at his feet, intending to dodge between his legs.

"Get up!" he bellowed joyously. I refused. He bent down and grabbed me with a hairy paw. Then he slipped on the soapsuds and the platform was upended. I clung to it. He stumbled against me and, with arms widespread, passed over my body.

A startled scream! A splash! A silence among the sailormen who had jumped clear of the platform in the nick of time. I glanced timidly from under my arm. Mr.

Boxley's head appeared from under the water in the tank ; he was blowing from the mouth like a porpoise. Grasping the side of the tank he scrambled out, the white suit clinging to his body like a rag, the hair matted to his forehead, the water forming pools on the hatch around his feet. He surveyed the sailormen who stood around, fidgeting nervously, with a baleful glare, his head shaking from side to side.

"Enough of this nonsense," he barked, as his right arm indicated the platform and the tank. "Clear it away," he roared, looking into the boatswain's half-shut eyes. He swung around on me. I felt foolish, standing half-naked and splattered with tar. "Get changed and report on the bridge," he snapped and, muttering imprecations, stamped off towards the ladder leading to the deck above.

A pregnant silence fell upon the sailormen. They gazed at each other, then gazed towards the bridge, seeking the captain's eye. It was the custom to "splice the main brace" before Father Neptune and his court departed. But the captain was nowhere to be seen. Dejected, the sailormen trooped away, blaming the mate for spoiling their fun and for the loss of their drink.

Burns helped me to the deck and then to the half deck, and Reggie brought turpentine with which to wipe the tar from my face and chest. Tramer was at the wheel. Storm clouds gathered ominously above my head. I sought comfort but there was none. All were silent in the half deck.

Captain McFarlane was on the bridge, standing in the starboard wing with Mr. Boxley, who had changed to clean clothes, when I arrived. He turned around and fixed me with a stern stare behind which I thought there lay a sly twinkle.

"I hear ye ha'e been misbehavin' yersel'. Mr. Boxley says ye pushed him in the water. Will that be so ?" he asked.

"N . . . ye . . . ." I stammered, blushing to the roots of my hair. I didn't know what to say. I wasn't sure just what I had done.

"The truth, boy !" thundered Mr. Boxley.



Captain McFarlane looked from under his brows at him.

"Dinna get excited, Mister," he advised. "Ye'll frighten the laddie." He turned to me inquiringly.

"I . . . I don't know, sir. I'm sorry if I did. I didn't mean to do it."

"You're sorry, eh?" shouted Mr. Boxley. "You told the second mate a lie this afternoon. I suppose you're sorry about that too?"

Captain McFarlane silenced him with an impatient gesture of his hand. I hung my head, knowing full well that I had lied and afraid to look into the kind eyes of the captain.

He took me by the arm and led me to the windbreak of the bridge.

"D'ye see yon sunbeams playin' on the mast, laddie?" he asked, inclining his head towards the forward well.

I gazed in that direction and saw the glint of the sun on the lower part of the foremast, a foot or two above the pinrail.

"Yes, sir," I answered eagerly.

"Weel! Get a rag frae the lamp trimmer an' wipe them awa'."

The order astounded me. I did not move. I gazed blankly from him to the sunbeams on the mast, and from the sunbeams back to him.

"Get a move on, laddie," he advised, in his quiet voice. "The sun will be gangin' doon afore ye ha'e begun. Pass word t' the men tae muster on the lower bridge as ye gang below."

I obeyed. The sailormen wiped their faces, doused their pipes, and trooped after with alacrity, slapping each other on the shoulder. The Old Man was a great scout, one of the best. They'd repay him, a hundredfold.

The lamp trimmer gave me a rag and tried to find the reason why I wanted it. I didn't tell him. He would know soon enough. All the crew would know, I thought ruefully, walking along the deck. It seemed such a silly thing I had to do.

"Wipe them away, boy! Don't stand there like a

stooky. Perhaps a little elbow grease will take them off!"

The bellow was Mr. Boxley's. I glanced towards him, hoping he might relent, but he walked out of sight behind the weather cloth, and I could hear him laughing boisterously.

I set to work. I smothered the golden sheen of the buff-coloured paint with the rag. The sunbeams fell upon the back of my hand, mocking me.

The sailormen came down from the bridge, wiping their lips. They stood around in groups, urging me to greater efforts.

Burns, perched on the derrick table, advised:

"Throw a bucket of water on the sun, Tommy-boy, an' put out its light."

Hall, beside him, shouted: "Why not cut away the mast at the deck? It would be so much easier."

I ignored their sarcasm. I did not speak. I could not speak. My heart was filled to overflowing with the ignominy of the task. If only there had been a place in which I could hide, where I could not hear the boisterous laughter which came full against the wind.

For two long hours, until the sun had reached the world's far edge, I wiped and wiped, sweat dripping from my face.

"Come here, laddie," ordered Captain McFarlane.

The tropical twilight was fast giving way to night when I stood before him on the lower bridge, weary in mind and limb. It is tiresome trying to do that which is impossible.

"I suppose ye think I'm a fool, laddie," he said, knocking out his pipe on the teakwood rail. "An' mebbe ye would like tae drop me intae the sea."

I smiled but did not speak. He went on:

"What ye ha'e been doin', laddie, was as futile as the lie ye told. Ye shouldna tell that a boy is sick when he isna. It wasna verra serious, but a lie is always a lie. There's no a place on a vessel for them. An' ye shouldna ha'e left the wheel. Better death than that. Medicine may be nasty tae the taste, but it has tae be taken. Ye ken what I mean. Ye can go an' get y'r supper."



"Thanks, sir," I mumbled humbly and turned away.

"An', laddie . . ."

I halted and turned back. He was filling his pipe with tobacco from his pouch.

"There's a wee bit cake frae the cabin table. Just ask the steward tae let ye ha'e it."

I ran from the bridge, tears blinding my eyes.

## CHAPTER IV

### LAND IN THE OFFING

THE trade winds held light, with calm seas, as southing was made towards the higher latitudes of the Magellan Straits. It was fine steaming weather, with skies as clear as a bell. In the morning watch the dawn came creeping over the horizon in a flush of pale green and orange as if an artist had spilled those colours until they had run, one upon the other, into the eastern sky. The sea, which was so grey throughout the night, leaped to life with dazzling iridescence, as if glad to be aroused to greet the coming of the day. Here and there a star struggled to maintain its place in the sky.

One morning when the weather had turned cold I snuggled into the folds of my greatcoat and, leaning over the weather cloth, peered towards the far horizon on which lay a heavy bank of leaden cloud. The Republic of Argentine was close at hand. I wondered if the land would soon be sighted and what it would be like.

Suddenly, out of the tail of my eye, I saw a silver disc. I straightened my back and turned towards the east. Venus was coming out of the sea, distorted to enormous size by refraction, and sending forth bright ribbons of silver against the pale colours of the sky as she came. It was the first time I had seen the planet in its full glory and I was gazing enraptured at it when, with a start, I chanced to glimpse Mr. Boxley standing on the port wing of the bridge like a man transfixed. His head was bared and thrown back upon the shoulders so that his eyes, which were ablaze with a strange glow, could sweep across the radiance of the east.

I had a feeling of fear for him, and I cried aloud—a startled, frightened cry—and raced across the bridge towards him.

He shook his head like a man who has been in the

water and wants to free it from his face, and slowly, so slowly it seemed he was returning to the deck from a far place, he gazed down at me. Then, reaching out, he grasped my arm.

"What's the matter, boy?" he asked.

"N-nothing, sir," I stammered and a rush of blood suffused my face.

"Come here, boy!" he ordered, in a voice strangely hushed.

He led me into the port cab and, leaning through the window, directed my gaze, with an outreaching sweep of his arm, towards the lower portion of the eastern sky.

"God made all that beauty, boy," he began, then paused to look into my eyes. "He made it for you and me to enjoy. All night He works to purify the world so that when the new day comes there is a sweetness in the air that is of Him. Sea life is lonely and often beset with hardships, but there are compensations. Watching the birth of day is one of them. It fills you with wonder, for with so much beauty there should be no evil. Yet there is. But, withal, you find a courage that will carry you through to the end." He paused again and rubbed a hand across his mouth. "I have watched the days come an' go, boy, for more than forty years, and I've never tired of the watching. When my times comes . . . an' it can't be far off now . . . I want to go at the breaking of the day. I want to go, boy, to meet the dawn."

His voice put a spell of sadness on me. I left his side and walked across to the starboard wing of the bridge. He did not seem to realize that I had gone, as he stood, bareheaded, gazing off across the iridescent water, his arms outstretched, his hands grasping the sides of the cab.

Suddenly I heard him snort. He strode across the bridge with stumping strides and halted a few paces from me. His eyes blazed from behind the collar of his pea-jacket.

He rapped out: "Where are your eyes, boy? What d'you think you're up here for? To stand an' dream like a love-sick girl? Why didn't you tell me there was the

makings of a storm in the west?" He inclined his head towards the bank of cloud.

"I didn't know, sir," I answered.

"You didn't know? What do you know?" he thundered. He spat into the sea. His glance swept the vessel, fore and aft, then came to rest on the western sky. "A *pampero*! That's what we're in for, boy. The dirt's pilin' up near the coast. We'll get it before another day is out. Tell the bos'n I want him—an' step lively. We'll have to snug her down."

I hastened to obey, inwardly jubilant that a storm was approaching. I was eager for the experience that would make me a fully qualified sailor.

The hatches, which had been left off to ventilate the coal, were replaced and the tarpaulins battened over them. Extra lashings were put on the boats and the gear around the decks. Deadlights were screwed into place over the glass ports in the forecastles, for being up in the bow, they would have to withstand the buffeting of heavy seas as the vessel forged ahead. When all this was done to the satisfaction of Mr. Boxley, who left the bridge and strode around the decks, with his eagle eyes prying into every corner, the sailormen resumed their usual duties of chipping rust and painting as if nothing exceptional was about to occur. And Mr. Boxley, when he returned to the bridge, ignored my inquiring glances and, settling comfortably against the weather cloth in the starboard cab, lighted his pipe. It didn't seem to be quite right to me. I wanted them all to maintain the stirring activity of the earlier hours, but I couldn't get it clear in my mind what they should do. I asked Burns at the breakfast-table.

"Never hasten on a storm, Tommy-boy," said he, looking up from his plate of curried meat and rice. "In the first place, you can never tell just how bad it's goin' to be, and secondly, it'll come quickly enough, an' you'll be happy when it's passed along."

"But I want to see one," I cried impatiently.

"There you go! Want! Want! Want! We are all like that, wantin' to experience every phase of the life in the first few weeks. Just hold your horses. You'll see



plenty of storms if you remain at sea. Mebbe one too many an' you'll make a juicy meal for a big jack shark. You won't be the first, either."

"Oh! Rats!" I shouted.

"No, Tommy-boy. Sharks. Not rats!"

I opened my lips to speak but immediately closed them. They were all laughing at me and I could see that they were more interested in teasing me than they were in a storm.

All day the calm held, although the bank of grey cloud rose slowly from the western horizon until the sky was obscured. The sea became sluggish with smooth-bosomed swells which rolled the *Monarch* from side to side until the water lapped over the bulwark rails and ran across the wells.

At first I liked it, but when I was at the wheel between four and six o'clock in the first dogwatch, there crept into my thoughts an idea that all was not well with my innards. They wouldn't stay up and they wouldn't stay down, but just seemed to float all over the place. Luckily there was the steering to think about, and every once in a while Mr. Boxley would enter the wheelhouse and gaze into my face.

When relieved by a sailorman at four bells, I ran into the half deck and flopped down on my bunk, hoping that Mr. Boxley would not want me again during the watch. I thought that if only the swell would cease, I would be all right.

Burns, Hall, and Tramer came in, each carrying a dish of food; they sat around and ate it under my nose.

"You'd better have a little, Tommy-boy," Burns advised, "for without food you cannot live an' you must live to experience the storm you were seeking this mornin'. It's comin'. D'you hear the wind?"

A squall broke as he spoke, staggering the vessel as it fell upon the starboard beam. Rain beat against the deckhouse and the wind screeched through the darkness. Above all came the strident blast of a whistle.

"That's the mate!" shouted Percy Hall. "He'll want you to get his oilskin coat."



I lifted my head from the pillow. The half deck went round and round. The lamp on the bulkhead spluttered and almost went out as the vessel heaved over. I ran my fingers through my hair as I threw my legs over the bunk board and dropped to the deck.

"Look here, Tommy," shouted Percy Hall. "Get back into your bunk. I'll answer the mate for you."

I hesitated, half-way to the door. Burns grasped Hall by the arm and held him back.

"Let him answer it himself, Percy," he said. "The sooner he gets used to this, the better."

The whistle came again above the piping of the squall. The mate would be impatient and in a ruddy rage. The door flung back on its hinges as I opened it. Burns pushed me away when I strove to grasp the handle and close it.

"Get up on the bridge!" he shouted. "I'll attend to it."

I couldn't see very well as I groped my way along into the lee of the deckhouse. I stumbled over a side-bunker hatch, barking my shins, and the water in the scupper reached over my ankles when the vessel heaved over. I thought of returning for my sea boots. But the whistle sounded again, peremptorily. I staggered on, the rain cold against my face, the wind clawing at my clothes.

At the foot of the ladder leading up to the bridge I paused for a moment to get my stomach, which was leaping about in the most alarming way, under control, and when I did, up I went. Mr. Boxley came out of the wheelhouse.

"What's the matter with you, boy?" he demanded. "Are you deaf?"

"N—no, sir."

"You're not, eh? Well, wash your ears. Get my oilskins and sea boots; then keep your stand-by watch up here, where I can get you without blowing my head off."

I fetched his oilskins. I walked out into the lee wing of the bridge and, leaning over the weather cloth, bared my head to the gale. It didn't seem to matter if the ship went down.

The half deck was deserted at eight bells. Wet to the

skin, I dropped on to the bunk and tried to sleep, but as the night advanced, the gale grew in violence so that it was all I could do to hang on to the bunk board, while I watched with anxious eyes the curtains swing out into the cabin as the vessel lurched over. I made a mental mark on the opposite wall where the foot of the curtains reached and watched to see if they would pass over it under the impulse of a roll greater than those which had passed. Often they did and I wondered what kept the vessel from turning completely over.

"It's a beast of a night," Tramer remarked, when he called me to go on watch at four in the morning, "but it's not so cold. Temperature's around fifty. The second mate says it should clear up by noon. Been sick yet?"

I shook my head.

"D'you think you can stand it?"

I nodded.

"I could tell the mate you were seasick. He might let someone take the wheel for you."

"Don't tell him!" I cried, dropping out of the bunk and shivering as a cold blast came through the door which Tramer held open.

"Just as you say," he said, "but I would, if I were you."

I shook my head again, wishing after he had gone that I had nodded instead. Gritting my teeth, I pulled on my oilskin trousers and jacket and passed out on to the deck.

The darkness leaped around me as I groped my way towards the bridge. Ice-cold spray, dashing high into the air, swirled on the shrieking wind. It beat against my sou'wester, flooding down into my eyes which smarted under the sting of the salt. Wiping it away with the sleeve of my oilskin coat, I gripped the storm rails on the deckhouse and struggled forward into the night from beneath the overhang of the boat deck. Over the fiddley the water streamed, falling on my back and swishing around my feet when it fell upon the deck.

A sailorman clattered down the ladder from the bridge, the light from a port glimmering on his wet oilskin. He swung over beside me.

"How are you makin' out?" he shouted, cupping his

hands around his mouth. He swayed easily on his feet as the vessel heaved over.

"All right!" I shouted back.

"D'ye want me t' give ye a hand?"

"N—no. I'll manage."

"Good! Keep a weather eye liftin' when ye get on the lower bridge. The wind's blowin' heaven's-hard full on the beam.

He disappeared into the night, a song on his lips. Clutching the whipping drum of the bunker winch, I glanced back over my shoulder, watching him go. I wanted to be like him. I wanted to feel that the gale was all a part of the day's work, but my stomach wouldn't let me. The door of the mate's cabin opened and shut. Mr. Boxley would be coming along the deck! Drawing in a deep breath to keep my stomach at bay, I lurched across the deck and reached the ladder leading up to the bridge.

Tramer was at the wheel. When I opened the door and entered the wheelhouse, he put the end of a length of line into my hand.

"Pass it around your waist, Tommy," said he. "She's rolling so heavily you'll need it to keep on your feet. It's made fast to the weather-door handle. When I get out, make the end I gave you fast to the lee handle. You can then hang by your middle if she heels too far over. I hope she doesn't, for I want to get a sleep. The Old Man's on the bridge, out on the weather wing. He won't bother you, though, unless she falls too far off before the wind. Course is sou'-sou'west. A point on either side will do on a night like this." He gave me the wheel. He said, "Sou'-sou'west."

"Sou'-sou'west," I repeated. The compass was swinging wildly, the bowl maintaining a level in its gimbals. The oil light in the binnacle cover flickered fitfully. I strained forward over the wheel.

"Have you got her?" asked Tramer.

"Y—yes, I've got her," I answered, not at all sure that I had.

He left the wheelhouse, banging the door behind him. I heard him report the course to the officer on watch and



I saw him swing past the window on his way below to his bunk. Mr. Boxley came to the door, opened it, and peered in.

"Are you all right, young fellow?" he asked.

"All right, sir," I answered.

He grunted and went away, leaving a nauseating odour of tobacco with me. I made the rope fast to the door handle and gave all my attention to the wheel, for with the vessel leaping about like a mad thing there was room in my thoughts for nothing else. Strangely, it quieted my innards and until four bells, when my trick at the wheel was over, I forgot them in my anxiety to keep the vessel upon her course. But when I left the wheelhouse to face the spray which drove across the vessel in a drenching stream, my body and soul lashing came adrift and I lay down on the cross-bunker hatch, in the teeth of the biting wind, momentarily expecting to take leave of my innards.

"Begorrah, boy! An' what's like to be the matter?" asked Pat Greenaway, the boatswain, halting on his way to receive his orders from the mate.

Looking up, I waved him away. I wanted to be left alone . . . to die.

He tightened the rope-yarn lashing around his waist to prevent his oilskin coat being blown over his head and went up on to the bridge. In a few seconds Mr. Boxley was at the after rail, looking down, his face red with the constant beating of the wind and spray upon it.

"Here, boy!" he bellowed. "Get on your pins or, by the Lord Harry, I'll knock the stuffin' out o' you."

I rose to my feet, clinging with one hand to the tarpaulin where it was tucked in at the iron cleat. I tried to look up but my head had become so heavy that the muscles of my neck couldn't support it.

"So that's it!" shouted Mr. Boxley, and he gave forth a joyous bellow and slapped his hands against his oilskin until I thought that he had taken leave of his senses. Then he turned and, in a rapid flow of language, issued orders to the boatswain, who chuckled and came clattering down the ladder from the bridge.

"Boy," said he, standing with his legs astride, beside

me, "there's a job I be after havin' for ye. Come forrard!"

He swung away into the lee of the forward house. I lurched after him. Near the ladder leading down on to the forward well he halted and waited until I came up to him.

"Kape close t' me," he advised and went on down the ladder. I followed.

Water spilled green over the weather bulwarks to gurgle through the winches and run white across the deck into the scuppers. Down into it we went to grasp the life line stretched fore and aft and, by it, haul ourselves into the lee of the forecastle head, breathless but, for the moment, safe. The sailormen sheltered there. Past them the boatswain led me and, in the bow locker, stagnant with the odour of oil and tar, he ordered me to scrape the paint from the deck. Then, laughing, he left me.

Odours took shape. Pea green they were and, darting about, attacked me from all sides, until helpless and worn out with the struggle, I took leave of my innards with a sigh of relief.

How long I lay in agony it is difficult to recall, but after what seemed to be years, I heard a frightsome crash above my head and, rising to my elbow, I saw through the forecastle alleyway an avalanche of water obscure the light of day. Then, full against the howling of the gale, I heard Mr. Boxley yell:

"All hands on deck! All hands on deck!"

The sailormen streamed from the forecastle out on to the deck. Rising to my feet, I wound a rope around my waist and, lurching against the bulkhead, staggered after them in time to see Mr. Boxley come down the ladder from the bridge deck on to the well, which was a turmoil of surging water. He swung into it. He grasped the life line. A green sea tumbled on board . . . smothered him. It cleared away. On he came, fighting every foot of the way. In the lee of the forecastle head, beside his men, he halted and filled his great lungs to capacity. Twice he did it, then shouted:

"The awning spars and wire reels have carried away. We're going to secure them."



The sailormen tightened the lashings around their waists. Mr. Boxley looked up towards the bridge. Captain McFarlane, leaning over the weather cloth, waved his hand. A lull came in the wind, a halt in the wild capering of the vessel.

"Ready, m' lads !" sang out Mr. Boxley. "Let's go !"

He swung to the right, grasped the handrail of the forecastle-head ladder and ascended to the top, the sailormen after him and I in their wake.

The forecastle head was a shambles. Broken awning spars lay jammed under the steam-pipe casing and in the windlass. Two wire reels were under the rails which had bent beneath the strain. The sailormen set to with a will, freeing them and lowering them to the deck below. The work was almost accomplished when a weird whining was heard high up beneath the driving scud, as if the heavens were being rent apart like a length of dry linen.

"Hold on for your lives !" sang out Mr. Boxley. There also came to me, against the wind, the warning cry of Captain McFarlane from the bridge.

I fell flat on my stomach on the forecastle head, my arms clasped around the starboard mooring bitts. Not a moment too soon ! From the corner of my eye I saw the sailormen clinging to the stays, to the windlass, to the bitts ; then high above me, rising until the sky, hung low with storm dirt, was completely obscured, there towered a fearsome mass of hurtling water. It broke as the slug-gish bow fell into the depth. I held my breath ! I shut my eyes and held on to the bitts ! A roar like thunder and the water was on me, striving to break me from my hold and hurl me to destruction. Then, in a few seconds, the water had cleared away, leaving me half-stunned. I struggled to rise. I must get to safety.

"Sink your soul ! Get down !" I heard Mr. Boxley yell.

The deck was slimy under my feet. I looked around. A second sea was towering high over the rail. The vessel heeled heavily as she sank into the trough. I fell flat on my stomach and clutched for the bitts. My fingers clawed at the air, at the deck, as I slid helplessly towards the lee

side of the forecastle head. Over on my back I rolled, to see the leaping water almost upon me. Then a black and shining oilskin shut it from view.

"Hold on to me, boy!" I heard Mr. Boxley yell above the growling of the sea, and instantly his weight fell full upon me.

I grabbed him as the comber broke over the forecastle head, carrying us before it like pieces of cork. Suddenly our progress was stayed. The bow rose up from the trough. The water freed to the deck below. Opening my eyes, I saw Mr. Boxley was clinging to the legs of a sailorman who, in turn, had hold of the steam-pipe casing.

I looked at Mr. Boxley. He was gazing around to seawards.

"All right, men," he shouted. "Get below!"

Like half-drowned rats we scrambled to our feet and obeyed, taking what was left of the awning spars with us. In the lee of the forecastle head he turned to me.

"Who ordered you on top?" he asked, not unkindly.

"You, sir," I answered. "You ordered all hands on deck."

Across his eyes there passed a gleam of pride. He shrugged his shoulders and looked down at me.

"You'll make a sailor, boy," he said and, nodding his head with approbation, he turned on his heels and swung aft through the surging water on the well.

I was inordinately happy, though wet to the skin with ice-cold water. Not only had I gained the good graces of the mate, but the seasickness, which had gnawed at my innards, had gone. I understood why he had put me to work in the bow locker. It was to kill or cure.

In the mess room I ate a hearty breakfast.

## CHAPTER V

### THROUGH THE MAGELLAN STRAITS

“GOSH! But it’s gettin’ nippy, Tommy,” remarked Burns, swinging his arms across his chest with exaggerated violence. “All the lazy, tropical days have gone for a while an’ it looks as though we’re in for a taste of the real thing. The Old Man must be expectin’ thick weather; otherwise we wouldn’t be riggin’ out this gear. You’ll get your bellyful of it aft to-night, I’m thinkin’. What ho! for the life of a sailor, says I, wishin’, at the same time, for the comforts of a landlubber. They’re lucky bounders. Just think of them goin’ to a music-hall or sitting snug in a parlour with a pretty girl. Gosh! but it makes my gorge rise.”

We were on the poop, wrapped up to the neck in heavy-weather clothes, clearing away the sounding machine which was used to ascertain the depth of the water on our approach to the coast. The gale had died away, leaving long, sleek swells to which the vessel rolled easily as though she enjoyed it. The land lay behind a cold mist which came, on a light wind, from the vicinity of Cape Horn. The sea was of a dark and sullen grey, the sky overcast with stratus through which the sun shone wanly at times but without warmth. The decks were wet and had a cold appearance, like the deserted streets of a city on a winter’s night.

“I don’t see what there is to grumble about,” said I with enthusiasm. “It’s great . . . all this.”

Burns gave me a scathing glance and sat down on the poop hatch.

“D’you mean to tell me, Tommy, that you like this?” he cried, indicating the world about us with a wave of his arm.

I nodded.

He looked at me very closely.

"But just think of a house in Glasgow, away from the sea, with an open fire blazing in the hearth. You are in an easy-chair with a book. The wind is whistlin' around the eaves an' you know you don't have to stand a watch. Think of it!"

I did and a feeling of homesickness came over me as it does over every wanderer, I suppose, at the mention of an open fire, an easy-chair, and a book. I wondered what my folks were doing and if they were thinking of me so far away. But the mood was fleeting. There was the prospect of sighting land in the morning watch and I was thrilled with anticipation, for it would be the first land sighted since our departure from England, and a touch of "channel fever" had crept into my bones. Not even an open fire or the offer of a square meal would have lured me away from the ship. I told Burns so.

"You're hopeless, Tommy," said he, laughing. "You'll be on double watches to-night, four hours on and four hours off, an' perhaps that'll make you change your mind. The Old Man always doubles up all hands when making the passage of the Magellan Straits. It's dangerous work, especially at this time of the year. We were more than a week doing the three hundred miles last trip. There's always this, though. We might get a salvage job an' get enough out of it to have a holiday when we get back."

I looked at him inquiringly.

He warmed up to the theme. "Suppose a vessel, when making the passage, breaks down and commences to drift, on the swift current, towards the rocks. We come along in the nick of time, put a towline on board of her, and yank her to a safe anchorage. The underwriters—those chaps who insure her—out of the bigness of their hearts, pay to our company a large sum of money which we, who have risked our valuable lives, share. An' there you are!"

"But it doesn't occur very often."

"Granted, Tommy-boy. But this might be the time. I'll need the money, too, for I'm goin' up for my ticket when we get back."

"Apart from the money, it would be great fun, wouldn't it?" I suggested.



"Gosh! There you go again. Fun! D'you think everything is fun?"

"It would be, though," I insisted, hoping, deep down in my heart, that a salvage would come our way. It would be something to write home about.

He shook his head with a look in his eyes which told me very plainly that I was utterly hopeless.

"The trouble with you is that your imagination runs away with you," he said. "I hope, though, that you catch up with it before you're many years older; otherwise you're in for a hard time. Let's get on with the job before you begin to tell me that this is all a picnic an' that we're up here pickin' daisies, instead of shiverin' in the cold. Fun! Holy jumpin' Joseph! To think that I should live to hear this called fun!"

A cold rain swept across the poop. He rose from the hatch, his face hidden deep in the collar of his oilskin coat, and walked over to the sounding machine, from which he took the canvas cover and ran the wire over the sheave on the after rail.

"Make the sinker fast," he ordered curtly, "and arm it in readiness for the fun."

I slipped the noose of the wire over the end of the twenty-eight pound sinker, into the bottom of which I pressed a mixture of soap and tallow which was to bring up a sample of the ocean bed when the sounding was taken.

Burns nodded approvingly and, without a word, walked forward. I lingered awhile beside the machine, rehearsing in my mind the procedure of taking a cast of the lead. I wanted to be proficient in case, in an emergency, I should be ordered to take charge.

Double watches were set at noon. Burns and I were on duty with the captain and second mate and now, in addition to a trick at the wheel, I had to stand lookout in the lee side of the bridge. Although it meant twelve hours on duty out of the twenty-four, I was "tickled pink", for not only would I be near the heart of the vessel from where she was controlled, but I felt that if I kept my eyes and



ears open, I would learn a little of the fundamental principles of command, a goal which I was willing to undergo any hardships to attain. Already I saw it looming through the mists of the future. My dreams, in the silent night watches, were filled with visions of a proud vessel on whose bridge I stood, master of all I surveyed.

But now there was work to be done. I stood watch, in a driving rain which ran down my neck after it beat against my face, from eight until midnight, and when I went below to my bunk I couldn't sleep because my feet were so cold and the blankets, under which I curled like a cat, were damp from a leak in the deck head. At four on a dark, misty morning I was back again on the wind-swept bridge, my teeth chattering and shivers playing hide and seek up and down my spine.



MR. SLATER,  
THIRD MATE

Soon my eyes became accustomed to the gloom. Captain McFarlane was standing on the weather wing of the bridge, smoking a cigar, and every time he puffed at it a warm, pleasant odour drifted down to me. I resolved to smoke as soon as I could get his permission. It seemed such a comfort to him. Tramer had whispered

to me, when I had relieved him, that the captain had been on the bridge all night and that he would not leave it until the passage of the Straits had been accomplished. I envied him his responsibility and set him high on a pedestal. Beside him, pacing back and forth, was Mr. Boxley. From time to time I heard the low rumblings of his voice. In the centre of the bridge, a dim glow from the binnacle light glimmering on his wet oilskin coat, stood Mr. Slater, the third mate, with his face turned into the wind, his eyes peering ahead. Behind him, at the wheel, was Burns. I couldn't see him, but the clatter of the steering rod told

me that he was awake. On the forecastle head, a shadow silhouetted against the grey curtain of the sky, the lookout man leaned on the forward rails with no shelter to protect him from the weather. When one bell, at half past four, was struck on the bridge, he answered it, and when the silence had shut down again he reported, in a drawling voice :

"Lights are burning bright, sir, an' all's well."

"Aye ! Aye !" answered the third mate.

Silence again. I watched the water fall away white from the bow and foam along the run with phosphorescent jewels sparkling through it.

A light flooded from the galley skylight, which was on the boat deck, abaft the funnel. Ah Tie, the Chinese cook, had kindled a fire, and appetizing odours wafted on the eddying wind up to the bridge, playing havoc with my appetite. I longed for six o'clock and the pot of tea and hard-tack which would come with it.

Two bells were struck, startling me almost out of my skin. I looked round guiltily, fearing that perhaps Mr. Slater had seen me. I sighed with relief. He was gazing ahead. But Captain McFarlane was walking from the weather side towards the centre of the bridge. He halted beside the third mate. I heard him say :

"We should be on soundings, Mister. Ye'd better gang awa' aft an' tak' a cast."

"Aye ! Aye, sir !" answered Mr. Slater. He turned towards me and said : "Get the stand-by man, Tommy, and go aft on the poop."

I ran from the bridge and along the forward well. The sailorman was in the forecastle, sitting at the table, carving sails for a boat he was making from a piece of wood.

"We're going to take a cast !" I cried. "You're wanted on the poop."

He put his gear away and followed me along the deck. The first faint streaks of dawn lay close upon the eastern horizon. The third mate was on the poop, putting the glass sounding tube in its brass case, which was made fast to a line a few feet above the sinker.

"Ease the sinker over the side," Mr. Slater ordered. "Then stand clear." The order came jerkily from between his cold lips.

The order was obeyed in silence. He placed the feeler on the piano wire, released the brake. With a whirl the reel commenced to rotate, the sinker struck the water with a splash and disappeared into the depth. Suddenly the wire, which had been so taut with the strain, slackened beneath the feeler.

"Not much water !" exclaimed Mr. Slater. "Run up on the bridge, Tommy, and tell the Old Man there's not much water !"

I ran along the decks, a fierce excitement lending speed to my limbs. What if the vessel was going on shore ? What if that should happen before I could reach the captain's side and give him the third mate's warning ? I took the ladders leading up to the bridge in a bound. The captain was nowhere to be seen. Mr. Boxley came out of the starboard cab towards me.

"Where's the captain ?" I cried.

"What !" he snorted.

I halted in my tracks, dumbfounded.

"Where did you learn your manners ?" he demanded.

"Don't you know enough to respect the bridge ?"

"I . . . I'm sorry, sir. But I wanted to tell the captain that there isn't much water."

"What's that, laddie ?"

I whirled around to face Captain McFarlane, who had come from the chart room.

"The third mate told me to tell you, sir," I cried, "that there isn't much water."

"I didna expect much, laddie," said he, laying a hand on my shoulder. "Just nip aft again an' tell him it's all right. We ha'e got hold o' the light on Cape Virgins."

I had an impulse to stick my tongue out at Mr. Boxley, but deciding that discretion was better than impudence, I returned to the poop and lent a hand to heave in the lead.

By daylight the *Monarch* was abeam of Cape Virgins and heading, under a full pressure of steam, through the wide entrance of the Straits towards the first Narrows.





THE STRAITS OF MAGELLAN





"Tell them to shake her up doon in the engine room," Captain McFarlane had said to the third mate, "for we'll ha'e to try an' mak' it while the tide is in oor favour an' the win' abaft the beam."

After that he had gone into the starboard cab, where the charts were spread out on an improvised table, and stood gazing towards the land like a man transfixed. Ahead, and off the starboard bow, was one of nature's remarkable experiments in magnificent and eerie scenery. From the grey water, towering mountains reached towards the heavens, where they were crowned with a soft mist. In the angry glare of a rising sun they were now gold, now grey, now silver, but always drenched in mystery and impenetrable with perpetual snow. They seemed to frown defiantly on the vessel forging ahead in their shadow, and I realized the danger of the passage and the necessity of taking every precaution. An error of judgment on the captain's part, and we would be cast away on an icebound, inhospitable shore to starve, possibly to be frozen to death. Thinking of salvage and of what Burns had said, I shivered. It didn't seem quite fair that we should benefit from another's misfortune, not in such a place.

Captain McFarlane, shaking his head, sighed and, heaving the overcoat up around his shoulders, sauntered across the bridge towards me. The sunlight fell on his glistening beard and made each crinkly hair seem a thread of red gold. His imperturbable blue eyes held a fearless strength. I thought of him as a god, the mountains and the sea subservient to his will.

"It's a braw sight, laddie," said he, "an' ane that stirs up the blood. It minds me o' the Black Coolins in Skye. I played aroon' them when I was aboot your age. There was the pinnacle o' Sgurr Dearg. It was aften lost in the mist an' I thought if I could clim' tae the top, I would be able tae touch the sky." He laughed into his beard. He went on: "But when I did, I couldna. I was terribly disappointed. I didna ken muckle aboot things then. Ye see, laddie, it disna matter how far ye reach, ye canna reach as far as ye would like. We're a wee bit like the

mountains, reachin' up towards the sky an' never quite reachin' it." He laughed again and said: "An' am blessed if I ken what we would dae if we did."

He left me then, wondering why he had spoken and what he meant. But he was always like that. He seemed to understand the thoughts which disturbed each member of his crew and came, at the most opportune moment, with a word of encouragement or cheer.

After breakfast I lay down on my bunk, for it was my watch below, but I could not sleep. The First Narrows were to be made by eleven and whispers were flying around the vessel that it was a race against the tide. Mr. Boxley was heard to vouchsafe the information that our speed was less than that of the current and that the passage was impossible until the turn of the tide. The third mate stated that Mr. Boxley didn't know what he was talking about, nor did the captain either. He argued that if the vessel was kept in close to the shore, the full force of the flood would be escaped, and to strengthen his argument, he drew diagrams on the mess-room table with cold tea. I lay awake, wondering who was right, while curbing a desire to go out on deck.

Suddenly the door of the half deck was flung back on its hinges and Tramer came in, his face blue with the cold, his eyes bright with excitement. A pool of water gathered around his feet from his oilskin while he gaped at me, recovering his breath.

"She . . . she can't make the passage of the Narrows," he cried. "She did manage a little headway for a while, but now she's falling off."

I sat bolt upright on the bunk, holding the blankets up around my neck in a vain effort to stave off the sting of the wind. My teeth chattered with the cold. My feet were like pieces of ice.

"Is there any danger?" I asked, a little nervously.

"I'm not quite sure. Before the mist shut in, I could see two rusty wrecks on the beach. They must have got caught in the tide or else dragged their anchors. They must have had a terrible time of it, for they're lying on their beam ends with jagged rocks all around, which

would make it difficult to launch the boats. I only hope that we . . ."

He paused and cocked his head attentively. The shrill blast of a whistle came down on the wind.

"That's the second mate," said he, "or mebbe it's the mate. They're all up on the bridge with the Old Man. I'll have to go and answer it. You'd better get up and into some warm clothes, in case we have to leave her. Percy is calling Burns, though I expect he'll sleep through it. He always does. So long!"

He left the half deck, banging the door with such violence that the gust of cold air almost blew me out of the bunk. From a heap of soiled and damp clothes I selected the driest and quickly donned them, holding my breath at their clammy touch. They warmed immediately against my body. From a box in the top drawer I took a pantile and nibbled at it, to stop the chattering of my teeth. My oilskins were stiff and unwieldy, like a suit of armour, but I struggled into them and reached the deck as the engine-room telegraph clanged ominously in the bowels of the vessel.

There was no sign of anyone on the after well or on the poop, and as the engines slowed down and stopped it seemed as though the vessel was already deserted. I clung to the rails outside the half deck, wondering what I should do. Being off watch, I had no business on the bridge and the boatswain would only tease me if I reported to him. I looked into the other half deck. It, too, was deserted. Burns, I concluded, must have felt the severity of the situation and, contrary to his usual custom, gone on deck. But why hadn't he called me? In my ignorance I was helpless. Yet something had to be done. A driving sleet partly obscured the land, which seemed to be dangerously near and coming nearer all the while. A ribbon of white foam lay at the foot of the rocks. The rumble of the water came through the sighing of the wind.

The engine-room telegraph clanged again. A pump wheezed. A thud or two and the engines commenced to turn over, slowly at first but quickly gaining speed. From the wash along the run, I saw that they were going astern.



Perhaps the vessel was in danger . . . too close to the rocks!

Leaving the rails, I ran around the corner of the deck-house and hastened towards the bridge, only to meet Burns coming aft.

"You aren't frightened, Tommy-boy?" he shouted, extending his arms to halt my progress.

I slid on the deck to keep myself from bumping into him and looked up into his face, which seemed to have been chipped from a block of mahogany, so red with the cold it was.

"No," I lied, a little ashamed of my fears.

"You should be in your bunk, having the sleep of a cherub," said he, with a laugh, "instead of being out in this. He-men we need to-day, for there's a he-man's work to be done."

"Then the ship is all right?" I asked.

"Mebbe she is an', again, mebbe she isn't. But the Old Man is on the job an' I think you'd better leave it to him. I wouldn't interfere, if I were you. He knows what he is doin'."

"I don't want to go back to my bunk," I stated, "nor do I want to take the Old Man's place . . . unless, of course, he sends for me!"

"Ho! Ho!" shouted he with a joyous bellow. "So that's it. You're beginnin' to feel the feet under you an' it's a man's work you crave. All right, Tommy-boy, come along with me an' get your fill of that romantic art—heaving the hand lead in the face of a blizzard."

From a locker in Mr. Boxley's cabin he took a new lead line and, ordering me to fetch the fourteen-pound lead from the wheelhouse to the forward well, he swung away, whistling as though it was a holiday. He was in the chains, a few feet abaft the fore rigging, when I arrived with the lead. He slipped the noose on the line through the grummet and pulled it taut.

"Take it up on the forecandle head," he ordered, handing the lead back to me, "an' drop it when I sing out. There's too much wind to-day to swing it over my head."

I nodded that I understood and hastened away, for-

getting the cold in my eagerness to obey. I was also in the centre of activity.

Mr. Boxley was on the fore-castle head, standing up in the nose and swinging his arms across his chest while he gazed up towards the bridge. The carpenter, with Hall's assistance was clearing away the anchors. The sailormen were sweeping the sludge into the scuppers. Above the weather cloth on the bridge could be seen the sou'westers of the captain and the second and third mates.

The vessel, broadside on to the current, was drifting back over the way she had come and seemed to me to be perilously near the shore, although no one appeared to be very worried about it. The engines stopped and started, and I concluded that Captain McFarlane was manœuvring so as to keep as much out of the full strength of the current as possible.

Suddenly the vessel vibrated throughout her length. The steering-chains rattled over the leads. The bow commenced to swing into the teeth of the wind, which roared down in a blinding squall. Spray slapped over the fore-castle head to fall as ice upon the deck.

"What water?" sang out Mr. Slater from the bridge.

"What water it is, sir," shouted Burns and, facing me, he bawled: "Let go-o!"

I released the lead from my numbed fingers. It disappeared beneath the surface of the grey water. The coils of line fell from Burns's hand. Suddenly he bent over, felt the bottom.

"By the mark thirteen, sir," he shouted and beckoned to me to come into the chains beside him.

"Up it comes, hand over hand!" he ordered, passing the line over to me. "Lay your back into it, Tommy-boy, like you were a deep-water man with hair on your chest, while I coil it ready to heave again. Smart's the word an' smart's the action!"

I leaned over the manrope of the chains and commenced to haul home the lead, which was weighted with the current and trailing aft. The water froze on the line, numbing my fingers, which soon lost all feeling. The sleet drove into my face, to run down my neck and, it



seemed to me, into the toes of my leather sea boots. Burns yelled in my ear: "A song, Tommy-boy! Now is the time for a rollicking song!" And he laughed when the line slipped through my fingers as, frantically, I hauled hand over hand, wondering if the lead had become fouled on the bottom.

At last it was on board and I was on the forecastle head again, waiting for the word to let go. The vessel was now head to the wind, stemming the current which gurgled along the run with the speed of a mill-race. She was being edged, a few degrees at a time, closer in towards the shore, which was a mass of jagged rocks.

"Another cast!" boomed the third mate.

"Another cast it is, sir," returned Burns. Again he bawled: "Let go-o!"

Into the water fell the lead! A minute of waiting!

"Deep eight, sir!" Burns shouted.

The water was shoaling! The rocks seemed almost under the port quarter! A rust-streaked wreck, her foremast fallen across the bridge, loomed out of the mist like an omen of disaster.

"Let go the anchor!" sang out Captain McFarlane through a megaphone.

"Let go, sir!" answered Mr. Boxley, signalling to the carpenter, who was standing by the brakes, with a wave of his right hand.

The carpenter turned the lever on the port side. The chain rattled over the gypsy with a smother of red dust which obscured the mate for a time. The anchor took the water with a splash. The chain eased, then tautened.

"Four shackles in the water an' hold on!" sang out Captain McFarlane.

"Four shackles, sir," answered the mate.

All hands stood watching while the chain grunted and tugged, sparks flying from it. Four shackles, sixty fathoms of chain, passed over the gypsy.

"Give her a kick ahead, sir," shouted the mate.

The engine-room telegraph clanged. The vessel held against the current as the engines turned slowly over. I turned to Burns.

"Is it always like this ?" I asked.

"Life at sea is always a picnic, Tommy-boy. A rollicking picnic, full of fun."

He clutched me by the arm. The mate was shouting : "She's dragging, sir !"

"Give her the other anchor, Mister !" sang out Captain McFarlane, in a voice remarkably calm.

"The other anchor, sir !" answered the mate, signalling to Hall, who turned the starboard lever.

The moments dragged with a fearful intensity, as both anchors ranged ahead. At last, after what seemed an eternity, Mr. Boxley sauntered aft on the forecastle head and shouted :

"That's got her, sir !"

"Ye can screw her up, Mister," answered Captain McFarlane.

Burns jumped down from the chains and, taking hold of my arm, raced me up and down the forward well until the blood thawed in my body with a tingling, heady warmth. Short of breath at last, he stopped and slapping me on the back said, with a laugh :

"We'd better nip along an' get a bite to eat, Tommy-boy, for it's almost eight bells an' we have to go to work."

The anchors were hove up at four in the afternoon when the current eased off, taking the wind with it and leaving a sky which was as hard as the mountains that seemed to hold it up. In the twilight the passage of the First Narrows was made without mishap and the vessel headed towards the Second Narrows, beyond which lay the broad Famine Reach, which could be navigated with safety during the hours of darkness. Watch succeeded watch uneventfully, with the captain always on the bridge, muffled up to his ears in his greatcoat and smoking long, black cigars.

During the afternoon of the second day, when the vessel was in the narrow waters of the Crooked Reach, having come through the Froward and English reaches, the sky lowered below the mountain tops and snow sifted gently down, whitening the decks and overcoats and

shutting in the range of visibility to a quarter of a mile or less. From the starboard cab Captain McFarlane and Mr. Boxley eyed it uneasily, looking at each other from time to time and shaking their heads.

The speed was cut down and the vessel groped her way through the blinding curtain, a strident blast of her siren echoing and re-echoing uncannily through the still air, reminding those upon the bridge how close the rocks lay.

"We should be near Butler Bay," Mr. Boxley remarked, squinting into the snow, then turning towards the captain.

"Aye, Mister. I was thinkin' that," said Captain McFarlane shortly. He took a turn across the bridge, seeking a clearance in the pall of grey. "A lot o' time's been lost," he went on, halting again in the starboard cab, "but mebbe it would be better to anchor. A ship afloat, though a wee bit late, is muckle better than ane sittin' on a rock. Ye'd better stand by, Mister, an' we'll poke intae the bay."

Mr. Boxley glanced over his shoulder at me.

"Pass word along to the carpenter to stand by," said he. "We're goin' to an anchor."

The darkness had shut down, black as pitch, when the vessel crept past a rocky headland and came to an anchor in six fathoms of water, close to the shore, which was a streak of white, dimly seen.

"She'll be safe enough here until daylight," Mr. Boxley remarked to Burns, when he came on to the bridge from the fore-castle head, blowing into his hands. "One of you can stay on watch, the other can go below. Better still, split the time up between you. The officers will be on the bridge."

Burns gave me the first watch, stating that as I was young, I needed more sleep than he, and then he left me to pace the deck alone. I walked up and down beside the fiddley, frightened a little by the silence that had fallen over the vessel and by the snow-clad desolation which was my world. Wild tales had been told me by the sailormen of the Patagonians who, naked as the day they were born, lived in the adjacent mountains, coming down at night to attack vessels held up by the fog and snow. I



wondered what I should do if a horde of them popped over the bulwark rail. I thought of procuring my sheath-knife from the half deck, to have it ready for a bloody emergency. But Tramer, I knew, was sleeping and I didn't want to waken him. In the fiddley I found an iron hatch bar. A little heavy, I concluded, weighing it in my grip, but laying it against the deckhouse, handy to my reach, I felt much better. There was nothing else to be found; it would have to do. But no Patagonians came and, a trifle disappointed, I replaced the hatch bar and went below when Burns came on deck.

It seemed as though my head had scarcely touched the pillow when I wakened with a start to find Tramer shaking me by the shoulder and dropping the snow from his sou'wester on to my face.

"Show a leg, Tommy," he shouted. "It's time to turn out an' the Old Man is going through."

"Is it still snowing?" I asked, sitting up.

"Yes! Thick as a hedge. But one of the mail boats crept by the stern a few minutes ago and the Old Man says that if she can make it, so can he. He's in an H of a stew too. I expect he's been up so long he couldn't sleep. You can have another ten minutes. I'll be in at five to. I've just told Boxley that he's to heave away at eight bells."

But I didn't take advantage of the extra ten minutes. I hopped out of my bunk and into my clothes as quickly as possible. I wanted to be on time to see the vessel getting under way with the snow falling all around her, thick as a hedge.

It was accomplished in an eerie silence, all hands tense and cold. Captain McFarlane, standing in the centre of the bridge, with his outstretched hands grasping the stops of the weather cloth, seemed like a snow man, so white and still he was, only moving his head when he gave an order to Burns at the wheel. When Mr. Boxley came up, after seeing that the anchors were secured, he moved noiselessly over the soft snow into the starboard cab and, wiping his hands on his overcoat, switched on an electric torch and pored over the chart. Occasionally, as the



vessel crept through the darkness, Boxley approached Captain McFarlane and spoke in a low, rumbling voice ; then he returned to the starboard corner again and peered ahead.

Only once on that strange morning did either of them notice me. Shortly after two bells, when the vessel had been under way for an hour, Captain McFarlane came over to where I stood and, holding the weather cloth down so that he could see over it, he asked :

"D'ye ken where the moon is, laddie ?"

"I . . . I don't know, sir," I answered, startled at the singular question.

He laughed and came up out of the collar of his great-coat.

"Ye dinna, laddie ?" he asked, with feigned surprise. "It would be a gran' mornin' if ye could find it." And, laughing again, he returned to his position in the centre of the bridge.

I wondered how one with his responsibility could be so cheerful under such perilous circumstances. The cold was enough to strain the temper of a saint.

With daylight came a clearance and a stretch of water, free from dangers, through the Long Reach to Cape Pilar and the open sea of the Pacific. A vessel, too, came with the dawn, steaming on an opposite course, a white ruffle at her bow and the glint of gold upon her yellow funnel.

"A Liverpool packet," a sailorman told me, "one of the Kyber Line. Lean an' hungry but on a regular trade to the West Coast."

She didn't seem very hungry with her topsides newly painted and no rust upon her hull. I told him so.

"We'll be the same when headin' homewards," he remarked. "Clean clothes for homeward bounders ; rags an' tatters when you're headin' out. The owners like it so."

He spat into the sea with a shrug of disdain and, muttering under his breath, walked off along the deck. I gazed towards the steamer. Behind her, on the shore, was a small hut, banked around with snow, and towards it,

followed by two dogs, a man was strolling. I wondered what he could be doing in that bleak wilderness, and I thought how much more comfortable the sailormen were than he, even on a hungry ship, outward bound.

With the intention of making inquiries from Burns about the man on the shore, I turned and strolled towards the half deck, only to be arrested in my tracks by an exclamation from the bridge which drew my attention back to the oncoming steamer.

"She's got two black balls up!" the third mate cried.

Sure enough, two black balls were being hoisted on the forestay by a sailorman on her forecastle head. Doors banged open and feet clattered on the deck around me. All hands were rushing to the bulwark rail, their tongues voluble with excited chatter. Burns threw his arm across my shoulders.

"What did I tell you, Tommy-boy?" he shouted, with ill-concealed joy. "She's broken down! She's not under command! We're in for a salvage. A month's holiday will be a fittin' climax to the voyage."

"She's not asking for assistance," objected Tramer mournfully. "Two black balls mean that she can't manœuvre and that we must keep out of her way. Mebbe they're only doing a little repair work on her engines."

"Mebbe they are an' again mebbe they're not," cried Burns. "Repairs are not very often done in the Magellan Straits. It's a salvage job . . . you wait an' see."

All hands thought the same. Even Captain McFarlane and Mr. Boxley were straining their eyes through binoculars, expecting a signal from the strange vessel that had stopped and now lay across the current. But we passed her and no signal.

"Mebbe they're too busy," suggested Burns, disappointment in his voice.

"I told you so," sneered Tramer. But almost instantly his voice rose to a scream. "There they go!"

A two-flag hoist had freed to the masthead. Burns grabbed me by the arm.

"Come on, Tommy-boy!" he cried.

He raced up the ladder to the bridge. I followed, close at his heels.

Captain McFarlane shouted: "Put your wheel hard aport!" And turning to the third mate, he said tersely: "See what the signal means!"

"Aye! Aye, sir!" answered Mr. Slater.

He ran into the chart-room as the *Monarch* commenced to describe a white arc on the smooth water. Mr. Boxley ordered the boatswain to clear away a boat, ready for launching. Mr. Selkirk came scuffling through the snow in carpet slippers while with agitated fingers he buttoned his greatcoat over his pyjamas. His weary eyes were strangely animated. I stood beside Burns, clutching the rails, possessed of a wild excitement.

Mr. Slater came out of the chart-room, the ghost of a smile playing around his supercilious eyes.

"Well?" demanded Captain McFarlane.

Mr. Slater hesitated a second, cleared his throat. "He's got Z E up, sir," he answered. All eyes were on him. He went on: "It means . . ." he hesitated again . . . "it means, 'I do not like the look of the weather'."

Captain McFarlane snorted with angry astonishment. He looked towards Mr. Boxley. Mr. Boxley sniffed and looked away. Mr. Selkirk, with a grunt of disgust, shuffled towards the ladder which led down from the bridge. A murmur ran among the sailormen.

"Midship the wheel!" bellowed Captain McFarlane. "Get back to y'r course!"

The man at the wheel answered the command. He was the only one who spoke. Captain McFarlane stamped across the bridge, tut-tutting into his beard.

"Shall I hoist the answering pennant?" ventured Mr. Slater.

Captain McFarlane paused in his stride and looked him square in the eyes.

"Dinna answer him," he said testily. "He doesna deserve it!"

I could feel the disappointment in his voice. I could see it on the faces of those who stood around me. In a silence full of emotion, the *Monarch* swung back to her

course and proceeded on her way, haunted by a blast from the siren of the stranger.

"She's laughin' at us," Burns said dolefully, as we came down from the bridge. He shook his head sadly. "There's no holiday on pay for me this trip, Tommy-boy. I never did have any luck."



## CHAPTER VI

### THE SECOND MATE GETS A DUCKING

THE excitement of our arrival at Iquique, a nitrate port on the coast of Chile, was over. Out of a pale green dawn the pilot had come in a small boat and, clambering on board by the ladder suspended from the forward bulwark rail, had guided the *Monarch*, with many wild gesticulations and excited cries, into the harbour. Now she lay moored, two anchors ahead and one, borrowed from the local authorities, astern, in a bay a mile or more from the shore, which was a sun-baked, sandy spot, stretching away to the foot of high mountains on which no vegetation seemed to grow. Burns informed me that rain was unknown, the inhabitants drinking water distilled from the sea. It was terrible stuff, with the flavour of Epsom Salts! The stevedores, who came off to discharge our coal into lighters, certainly bore out his statement about the scarcity of water, for their skins were like parchment and their dark, flashing eyes sunken into their heads. When the day's work was done, they bathed in shovelfuls of water drawn from our pump, and to my amazement made excellent use of their puny bathtubs!

Moored a few hundred yards away was the *Comlibrae*, a four-masted bark, her tall, white-painted spars ever a magnet for my eyes. She had sailed across the Pacific from Newcastle in Australia with a cargo of coal and, having discharged it, she was loading nitrate for Germany.

In the twilight I stood, leaning on the bulwark rail, listening to the music of an accordion which was wafted across the water from her and watching the sailormen dancing on her deck. They sang and danced and whooped with delight! As it was the season of the northers, stiff gales which blow down the coast with little or no warning, no one was allowed on shore after sunset. At any moment

all hands might be needed to work the vessel from the bay out into the open sea. I wished that I could go on board of her to have a look around and to get acquainted with the gear which hung so romantically from her yards and of which I knew nothing.

As if in answer to my wish, Burns came into the twilight beside me and, placing an arm around my shoulders, said : "Dreaming, Tommy-boy ?"

I nodded.

"I suppose you'd much rather be on her than here. Remember, though, Tommy, that she's nothin' but an old rag wagon an' mighty soon there will be none like her on the seas. But dream on. . . . What I came to tell you was this : We're goin' to take the old second mate over to the *Colimbrae* in the gig. Some of his cronies there an' he's itchin' for a spree. D'you want to come ?"

"I'd like to !"

"Right you are ! Come along !"

The gig was in the water by the accommodation ladder. It had been lowered earlier in the day from its davits to take the captain ashore. I ran down the ladder and jumped into it.

"Easy, lad ! Easy does it !" cautioned Mr. Selkirk.

I clutched the gunwale to steady myself and looked around at him. He was sitting bunched up in the stern sheets, with the lanyard of the steering yoke over his knees. His deep-sea cap with its white cover was over his brow at a rakish angle, and his face, lighted up by the hurricane lamp at his feet, was rejuvenated and animated.

"Ye see, lad," he went on, "ye shouldna jump aboot in a boat wi' the energy o' a bull in a park. Ye're liable tae upset things an' I'm no in the mood tae be upset the no'." He smacked his lips. "I'm on a voyage o' discovery. Ye ken what I mean ? I'm expectin' tae be entertained wi' a wee dram an' no quite sure if I wull or no." He chuckled and dropped his gaze to where Burns and Percy sat at the oars. "Give way th' gither, lads !"

The oars dipped ! Phosphorus leaped from the dark water. We were on our way.

The night was black as pitch when we drew alongside

the *Comlibrae*, but a hurricane lantern burned dimly at the top of a pilot ladder which hung from the bulwark rail near the poop.

Mr. Selkirk rose gingerly to his feet and, grasping one of the lower rungs to steady himself, remarked :

"Ye'll bide close by for me, lads. I canna just tell how long I'll be. It'll depend on the reception an' the generosity o' ma cronies. But I'm hopin' tae be greeted wi' open arms . . . like the prodigal returnin' frae far distant places. Ye ken what I mean ?"

Puffing and blowing, he climbed up the ladder and dropped over the rail on to the deck. We heard him in conversation with someone ; then he looked down at us and said :

"Ye can mak' the boat fast an' come awa' on board. It'll be weary waitin' sittin' doon there twirlin' y'r thumbs. There's somethin' whispers tae me that the time's gaun tae be pleasant indeed."

He withdrew his head. We made the gig fast to the pilot ladder with alacrity and clambered on board. The tall masts seemed to reach right up to the sky. A pleasant odour of Stockholm tar filled the air. In silence we looked at each other. Mr. Selkirk was nowhere to be seen, but an old sailorman with a snow-white beard, who was evidently acting as night watchman, came up and asked :

"Y'r from the *Monarch* ?"

We nodded.

"Did ye bring any papers, lads ?"

We answered in the negative. We were sorry. We hadn't thought of it.

"Ye might send some across ter-morrow," he said. "We haven't had a bit o' news for months. It was a long passage an' the mails have gone a-missin'. Ye'll find our lads in the half deck."

We promised to send him some newspapers and turned aft towards the half deck, which stood by itself just forward of the poop, between the mizzen and jigger masts. Gay laughter sounded loudly on the still night. We went towards it in silence, each of us feeling, I believe, that we were on foreign soil.



The half deck door was open and the light from a small bulkhead lamp streamed out on deck. On our appearance at the door a commotion set up within ; in the twinkle of an eye we were acquainted with the six cadets of the *Comlibrae* ; and, sitting on the sea chests which ranged around the cabin, we were giving them the latest news from home. For more than an hour question after question was flung at us ; then in a lull the senior, a tall, red-headed chap with pale blue eyes, stood up and said :

"We were having a singsong before you fellows came on board. D'you want to join in ?"

We nodded.

"Bully !" He turned to a boy who was sitting on an upper bunk with his back against the bulkhead, and went on :

"Tune up the old fiddle, Peter, an' give us 'Rolling Home', for it's homewards we'll be rollin' before the week is out."

Peter lifted a fiddle from the bunk, tuned it, and, shutting his eyes, played while he sang :

"Up aloft amid the rigging,  
Sings the wild exulting gale ;  
Strainin' tack, an' sheet, an' halyards,  
While it fills each blinkin' sail."

"All together now !" the senior shouted and in a booming voice led the chorus :

"Rolling home ! Rolling home !  
Rolling home across the sea !  
Rolling home to dear old England,  
Rolling home, dear land, to thee."

"Another verse, Peter," the senior encouraged, "an' with more feeling. It's a night for sentiment."

Peter cleared his throat and looked around inquiringly.

"One of your own !" his shipmates cried.

He played and sang, pathos dripping from his voice :

"With a hand clasp'd to his belly  
Stands a sailor boy on high,  
Pleadin' to the cook an' steward,  
'Give me food before I die.'



"Not a piece of bread they gave him,  
But they left him standin' there,  
Till the skin upon his backbone  
Chafed a hole an' let in air."

"An' the chorus ! All together !" shouted the senior, leading again.

"Bully, boys," exclaimed the senior and, looking towards us, he asked : "How about you fellows ? Any singers, poets, comedians, or acrobats ?"

Burns laughed slyly and nodded towards me.

"I think he's a bit of a poet," said he. "I've seen some of his notes lying around. Sentimental stuff ! You know, what the girls like."

I blushed and could have punched his head, big as he was. He edged away, pretending to be afraid.

"Come on, there !" shouted the senior, and when I demurred he cried : "Give him a cheer, boys ! Three, boys, three !"

The deck head shook as they rose to their feet and yelled their heads off. I stammered and protested, but it was of no avail.

"Keep up the honour of the old *Monarch*," pleaded Percy, leaning towards me, "an' we'll promise not to kill you if you get too mushy."

I pulled myself together. I rose reluctantly to my feet. I turned so that the light from the bulkhead lamp was on my back, my face deep in shadow. In a thin voice, I recited :

"The wind from the northward  
through the rigging gaily sings ;  
The hull and spars are straining  
as the good ship onward wings.  
The barren shores of Chile  
are fading out a-lee.  
Merry songs are in our hearts,  
for homeward bound are we.

"Down near the Stormy Horn  
the majestic albatross,  
Linked to a drowned sailor's soul  
glides 'neath the Southern Cross.

To expiate the worldly sins,  
     life is drear and slow,  
 Yearning eyes he turns to us  
     as on we homeward go.

“Rolling past the Falkland Isles,  
     grim, desolate and wild ;  
 Upward through the doldrum calms,  
     serenely still and mild.  
 Recounting yarns of homeland  
     beneath a foreign sky,  
 Meeting the northeast trade wind  
     to help us homeward fly.

Storm-rigged and freshly painted  
     we leave the Trades behind,  
 Praying the Roaring Forties  
     will send a strong west wind ;  
 Freshening breezes behind us  
     set up a merry pace.  
 A bleak, rugged, storm-tossed tramp  
     joins in the homeward race.

“In the mist-grey morning of  
     an early springtime day,  
 The shores of Bonnie Scotland  
     to starboard safely lay.  
 There many friends are waiting  
     to welcome us from sea ;  
 Merry songs are in our hearts,  
     for home we soon shall be.”

I was frightened and a little flattered by the silence that filled the half deck as I sat down. All eyes were on me. I wondered what I had done !

Suddenly the senior shouted : “All together, boys,” and, waving his finger like a baton, he stood in the centre of the half deck, the flickering light from the bulkhead lamp turning the skin of his face to burnished bronze, and led the chantey :

“A is the anchor that hangs o’er the bow,  
 B is the bowsprit we often unshi-ip ;  
 C is the capstan we merrily go round,  
 And D are the davits which low’r the boats down !  
 E is the ensign that flies at the peak,  
 F is the fo’c’sle where all the men sle-up ;  
 G is the galley where the cook is found,  
 And H are the halyards which lower the sails down !”

The noise was deafening, as each of us strove to out-sing the other. It seemed to me that the entire ship would be aroused. The senior must have thought so too, for he motioned us to silence, and, looking at his watch, exclaimed :

"It's eleven o'clock ! Time to pipe down. But we had to do it. Make a noise, I mean," he was facing me, "to get the lumps out of our throats. That homeward-bound stuff strains the heart lashings of sailormen." He slapped his thigh and, turning to a chap sitting in the opposite corner to me, he went on : "It's your job to-night, Archie. With this crowd we'll need two loaves of bread. Try an' snatch a tin of jam too. Got guests, y' know, an' ten to one the chief steward is drunk by this time. While he sows some wild oats, we should harvest a corking feed !"

When Archie had gone out into the night, he explained that they each took a turn at stealing from the storeroom. "We don't do it every night, of course," he concluded, "only when we have a singsong."

"But don't you get enough to eat ?" I asked.

"Do you ?" he shot back.

"Yes . . . more than enough."

"Then consider yourself very lucky. This is a starvation packet. Most sailing vessels are. Half the time the Old Man tells us that the cook can't get into the galley because of the bad weather and the other half he just bawls us out for being ungrateful scoundrels. An' when you consider that we get paid nothing for our services, we should at least be fed. We are . . . on the day the cook bakes bread. To-night is a part of that day. But here's Archie."

Archie entered with three loaves, a tin of cabin jam, and one of sardines. He laid them on the table to the accompaniment of a whoop of delight, which was quickly silenced by the senior.

"I could have taken more," Archie boasted, "for the chief steward's as drunk as a lord an' so's your second mate. They've got their arms around each other's neck an' they're babbling about the good old days. Let's eat to them !"

A feast fit for the gods was spread out on the table. Each boy received an equal share of bread, jam, and sardines and, at a nod from the senior, commenced to eat. Not a word was spoken. The music of munching jaws filled the half deck.

Eight bells at midnight struck when the supper was finished and the crumbs had been swept up and the tins dumped into the sea.

"We'll have to turn in now," said the senior, addressing us from the *Monarch*, "for we've got to be up for work at six. We're loading the cargo, you know. You fellows can lie on the deck and I'll leave word with the watchman to call you when your second mate appears. Most probably it will be around dawn. The chief steward likes to make a night of it."

It wasn't quite as late, or as early, as that. At three o'clock we tumbled out of the half deck to man the gig, all too sleepy-eyed to talk. Mr. Selkirk, after innumerable farewells to the chief steward, stumbled down the pilot ladder and, his head weaving from side to side, floundered into the stern sheets, where he sat for a minute peering from one side to the other as if endeavouring to recollect where he was. At last a chuckle broke from his lips and he ordered us to push off. Then his head slumped down on his chest and he apparently fell asleep.

Burns, without easing his stroke, looked back over his shoulder at Percy and whispered :

"Take it easy. We don't want to make too much noise. You know how he acts when he wakes up !"

Mr. Selkirk struggled to consciousness.

"Eh ?" he snarled, leaning forward. "What's that ?"

Burns didn't answer. He maintained a steady stroke as if the other had not spoken.

Mr. Selkirk chuckled again and pulled with all his weight on the yoke lanyard. The boat answered her rudder and swung towards the open sea, which was as smooth as a pond and carried the flickering reflections of the brightest stars.

"Lay b—b—back on yer oars. W—we're h-headin' for Austral-yi," said Mr. Selkirk, with a drunken laugh.



He struck Burns playfully across the back of his hands with the lanyard of the yoke and, laughing again, leaned back in the stern-sheets and commenced to sing :

“Row . . . hic . . . row the boat,  
 Merrily up . . . hic . . . the stream.  
 Merrily . . . merrily . . . hic . . . merrily,  
 L—life is but a dream !”

He sat bolt upright and peered ahead as if endeavouring to see us through the darkness ; then, with a grunt of satisfaction, he leaned back again and said :

“Funny that ! Ishn’t it, m’ hearties ? L—life . . . hic . . . ish but a dream. L—life ish b—b . . . a . . . d—dream.”

His head fell forward on his chest and rolled from side to side with the motion of the gig in the seaway. He breathed heavily with his mouth wide open. I wondered if he was asleep. At that instant Burns looked over his shoulder and nodded to Percy. Slowly they turned the gig around, heading her back towards the *Monarch* without stopping to row. As if by some instinct, Mr. Selkirk started up and glared around.

“W—where’s sh my s—star ?” he demanded.

We all kept silent. Suddenly he yelled with glee :

“Th—there’s sh my star,” and standing up, he pointed astern. “That’s sh the w—way we’re goin’ L—life ish but a d—d—dream.”

He slumped down again and yanked the rudder hard over, heading the gig to seawards again.

“Who’s sh r—runnin’ thish boat ?” he demanded, and when no one spoke, he went on : “Firsh stop Austral-yi. I . . . I . . . I haven’t been . . . hic . . . there in yearsh.”

He slobbered to silence. The gig kept up a steady pace to the westward. Australia lay four thousand miles or more below the horizon. I wondered, a little fearfully, what would happen to us before he sobered up. Would a norther sweep down and drown us ? Would a current carry the gig far out of sight of land ? Would we all die of thirst and starvation ? The *Monarch* was out of sight

and the lights of Iquique were dipping low over the stern as they sank into the sea. Then I saw Burns lean back and whisper to Percy, who, in turn, leaned back and whispered to me :

"When Bruce gives the signal, rock the gig from side to side, keeping time with me."

I nodded that I understood. I waited, my heart thumping so loudly I thought that it would waken the second mate. Five minutes or more passed. The lights of Iquique disappeared. Around us stretched the dark water, fearsome and impenetrable.

Suddenly Burns "caught a crab" with a jar that shook the gig. Mr. Selkirk was awake instantly.

"Whatsh that ?" he cried in a startled voice.

"Something popped up out of the sea, just over the stern, sir," answered Burns respectfully.

Mr. Selkirk nodded his head with drunken wisdom and stood up to look astern. Immediately Burns snapped his fingers and leaned well over the gunwale to port. Percy and I followed his example. The gig all but capsized. Mr. Selkirk swore and clawed at the air. Burns swung over to starboard. We did likewise ! Water lapped over the gunwale. Mr. Selkirk tried to sit down but his legs gave way beneath him. He gave vent to an eerie scream and pitched headlong into the sea.

I sprang to my feet with a frightened cry. Percy grasped me by the leg and ordered me to sit down. Burns dropped his oar along the thwarts ; then fell flat on his stomach in the stern sheets and reached down into the sea.

"I've got him," he said, looking back over his shoulder. "He's like a drooked hen ! Come an' give me a hand to yank him on board, Percy. He's too much for me. You keep the boat steady, Tommy, an' don't get scared. He'll be sobered up when he comes on board . . . sobered an' a trifle wet . . . inside an' out. It's not exactly the proper manner for an officer to come on board, but then, under the circumstances, we'll excuse him !"

Percy crept aft to lend a hand. I sat in the bow, a hand on each gunwale. I thought they would never get him over the stern. He spluttered and swore and fought

them off, but at last it was accomplished and they dropped him on the bottom boards between the after thwarts, where he lay breathing heavily and spitting up salt water.

Without a word, Burns and Percy picked up their oars, turned the boat around, and, laying a course by the stars, headed back towards the land with long, strong sweeps.

The dawn was in the sky when the *Monarch* was reached. The watchman came down the accommodation ladder and helped Mr. Selkirk to the top, where he was standing, holding on to the bulwarks for support, when we came up after making the boat secure.

"Thank ye, laddies," said he, "for the swim in the sea. The water was a wee bit warm. But there's nothin' like a bath to wake ye up! Some other time we'll try an' reach Austral-yi."

He coughed deep in his chest and walked unsteadily towards his cabin. Burns and Percy linked their arms through mine and very soberly we followed him along the deck.

In the half deck I said : "You might have drowned him, Bruce."

He shook his head.

"He was too full of whisky to drown, Tommy. He was like a vessel with her ballast tanks filled to capacity, able to withstand rough weather. An', anyway, something had to be done. It was necessary to get back here, for in a few minutes we'll have to turn to, an' the Lord help us if we aren't ready when Mr. Boxley appears on deck."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MAKINGS OF A SAILOR

IT was a happy day on board when the cargo was discharged and the *Monarch*, flying light, took her departure from Iquique with the Australian flag fluttering beneath the fore truck and the Blue Peter being hauled down by Percy from the starboard yard arm, where it had flown for twenty-four hours as a signal to those on shore that the vessel was preparing to sail. As the anchors were hove home, three blasts from the siren were answered by three from the air whistle on the agent's launch which cut close across the bow after leaving the accommodation ladder.

"See it scuttle for the shore!" bellowed Mr. Boxley, looking down from the forecastle head. "Like a wharf rat scared o' the sea, that's what it is! We're deep-water men on a blue-water vessel. There's red blood in our veins, young fellow m' lad! We're glad to be rid of the land for a while an' be out where there's a man's work to be done." He spat across the rail into the wake of the fast-disappearing launch and, turning around, sang out to the boatswain: "Git out the hose an' wash the harbour dirt from off her. I'm sick an' tired of eating an' breathing coal dust. It may be good for steaming boilers but it's bad for the innards. Get her washed down!"

He guffawed and slapped me so vigorously on the back that the teeth rattled in my gums and I stumbled and almost fell over the rails.

"You're weak on your pins, boy!" he shouted. "Too much port, that's what it is! We'll have to stiffen them up. Lay along with the bos'n an' lend a hand an' make the broom head work or, by the Lord Harry, I'll smarten you up with a rope's end."

I ran off to obey, knowing that he did not mean what he said. He was in a fine fettle, as were all the members



of the crew, and as the land turned blue above the horizon, they overcame a mysterious restraint which had possessed them and burst into song.

“Where are you going to, my pretty maid ?

Oh, away Rio ;

Where are you going to, my pretty maid ?

We’re bound for Rio Grande.

Oh, away Rio,

Oh, away Rio,

Oh, fare you well, my bonnie young girl,

We are bound for Rio Grande.”

The brooms swept the coal dust away in time to the music. It was great fun to be ahead of the hose and to feel the cool water splashing on our legs. It was exhilarating to watch the sun sparkling on the sea and to know that for three weeks or more it would lay an unbroken ribbon of gold to the far horizon.

Months passed. The *Monarch* rolled across the Southern Pacific to Newcastle in Australia, where a cargo of coal was loaded. Off she went again, climbing the latitudes to Saigon in French Indo-China, where boys and girls who were not as old as I carried it on shore in small baskets upon their heads. Another round trip was made. We lived in an atmosphere darkened with coal dust ; we ate it in our food ; we slept in bunks so begrimed that they were jokingly referred to as the Black Holes of Calcutta. But it was all in the day’s work and no one growled.

In these months I became a part of the sea. In the long night watches, at my trick at the wheel or on the lookout upon the forecandle head, I reviewed the events of the day, striving to find a philosophy such as that of my shipmates. From each sailorman I took something intangible, secreting it deep down within my heart against the time when I could understand it fully. And from each of them I also took something useful.

Percy taught me navigation every evening in the second dog watch, sitting beside me in the narrow, stifling half deck, with the sweat running into his eyes. He was patient when I floundered through the mystery of

logarithms with a stubborn stupidity. He encouraged me with a pat on the back when I wanted to give it up. Burns gave me a little of everything, stating with a grin that too much of one subject was not good for a boy and that if I wished to be a sailor, I must be a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. Mr. Slater, the third mate, taught me to signal, giving me first the semaphore and later the Morse code with a lantern improvised by the carpenter from a tin biscuit box. Under the forecastle head, when Mr. Boxley was asleep in the afternoon, the boatswain showed me how to make a knot and turn a splice. He was a hard taskmaster, trouncing me with ridicule before all hands when I fumbled stupidly.

From Paddy Doyle, a fat little Irishman with a fight-scarred face, I learned to swear with such success that before the second call was made at Newcastle, I could roll off a string of deep-sea oaths with the gusto of an old-timer. On the forecastle head at night I would practise them in an effort to keep awake, when the softness of the tropical air threatened to lull me to sleep. I imagined myself as a hard-case mate, driving the sailormen to greater efforts on the wave-swept deck of a storm-bound wind-jammer!

But my joy knew no bounds when, under the tuition of McCarthy, the lamp trimmer, I learned to spit into the wind without it blowing back into my face. That was a great day! I prayed for a gale of wind so that I could display my skill to all those who cared to see.

I never did learn to chew a quid, although I tried the sweetest tobacco. In that I have failed as a sailor. But in the years ahead, I shall try again. "Duty," old Davy once said, "must never be shirked." And to chew a quid is one of the duties of a sailor.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CHRISTMAS EVE AND A SQUALL

ONE evening, on the second run from Saigon towards Australia, where rumour had it a homeward-bound cargo was to be loaded, the door of the half deck opened and Burns came in with a bundle of coloured bunting torn from old flags in his arms. Over his left eye, held fast by an elastic band, he wore a rosette of green and red paper, while over his head, suspended from a wire, was dangling something resembling mistletoe.

"Gentlemen," said he, draping the coloured bunting around him and standing erect as a poker, "I am a Christmas tree!"

I laughed. Tramer looked up from the book he was reading and said, a trifle sarcastically:

"I can't see any presents."

"Because, young man," Burns answered, with mocking severity, "you seek only the material things of life. I, although I may not look it, am the bearer of good tidings."

Tramer sat up on the bunk.

"Is the Old Man giving us a cake or has he, by any chance, shot a turkey that has wandered far out to sea?" he asked, and concluded: "He'd never buy one!"

Burns shook his head. As the mistletoe swung in front of his mouth, he pretended to kiss it solemnly.

"What the Old Man issues to fill our bellies I care not about. I come to tell you, gentlemen, that to-morrow we shall have a holiday. The steward told the cook, and that worthy person, in pidgin English, passed the word on to me as I passed the galley."

"The cook?" I queried.

"Surest thing you know, Tommy-boy. He is the man from whom all blessings flow. I expect, though, that the Old Man, at the supper table, ordered the mate to give all hands a holiday, an' the mate told the steward, an' the

steward told the cook, an' he told me. That's the way it usually goes. Round-ee come square-ee, as the Chinese say, but catch-ee all the same-ee."

"But they're not giving us anything," Tramer growled, lying flat on the bunk. "They've got to give us Christmas Day. We could claim it if they didn't."

Very deliberately Burns dropped the coloured bunting to the deck, took the imitation mistletoe and fastened it over the door; then, turning towards Tramer, he said:

"Granted we can claim Christmas Day, and possibly Good Friday. But isn't it better to think that we're gettin' something?"

"What's the use of thinking about it? We'll have to stand watch just the same and, on the slightest pretext, Old Boxley will turn us out to do something. If it isn't dry pulling, it'll be washing down. You wait an' see."

Burns's eyes sought mine. The little wrinkles around them straightened out. He shook his head forlornly.

"Did you ever see the like o' him, Tommy-boy?" he asked. Before I replied, he continued: "Here we are on a voyage from Saigon to Melbourne an' three days from our destination. The weather is fine an' Christmas Eve has come on board, bringin' a holiday in which we can dream of fat turkeys an' plum puddings. I come in to bring you the glad tidin's an' what do I receive? Dirty looks an' arguments! D'you know, I believe if Santa Claus himself entered this cabin, Tramer would ask him what the devil he wanted an' scowl at him because he didn't bring a clutter of presents instead of a holiday. But, Tommy-boy, the Irish are always cryin' for the moon. They just can't understand why it should be up there in the sky all by its lonesome instead of lying on the banks of Killarney where they could fight with the man who's supposed to dwell within it. But that's all the way. Christmas lies close aboard an' we've got to get busy an' decorate this place up a bit, just in case Santa Claus should chance by durin' the night, while makin' his way across the ocean from one country to another. Dump your books in a drawer an' let's make a start. A dash of colour is like a drop of grog at a funeral. You never can tell



what it'll cause to happen." He reached over and tickled the soles of Tramer's feet. "Come on! Up and out of it!" he shouted joyfully, and when Tramer kicked out, he backed away and said with a laugh: "The mince pies are pipin' hot, waiting for the stomach with a smile to digest, them!"

"Oh! Go to the devil!" Tramer shouted surlily and rolling over on the bunk, he faced the bulkhead and glued his eyes on his book.

"Gosh! But you're a wet blanket, if ever there was one!" said Burns, with feeling. "I'm not at all surprised that they packed you off to sea. It's a pity, though, that you found this vessel." He sat down on the settee beside me and put his arm around my shoulders. "D'you know, Tommy-boy, I don't know what we'll do if Santa Claus does come on board. We'll have to apologize for him an' it's a shame to have to do that for a shipmate."

"Perhaps we could say he was a stowaway?" I suggested.

"We might do that," Burns agreed. "Anything would be better than sayin' that he was one of us."

Tramer rolled over, sat up, flung his legs over the bunk board, and dropped to the deck.

"Oh! Shut up!" he growled, not unpleasantly, and, reaching down, he picked up the coloured bunting. "Come on! Let's get the job done," he said.

With a whoop of delight Burns sprang to his feet and embraced him so strenuously that Tramer fought him away, begging for mercy. Percy opened the door and came in to see what all the commotion was about and remained to help us hang the coloured bunting from the curtain rods and over the mirror and the door. When the decorating was completed, we went into the starboard half deck and hung what was left of the bunting there, and then we sat around and looked at each other.

I struggled to keep my thoughts away from that homeland so far across the sea. I counted the throbs of the engines. I listened to the sighing of the wind, which seemed to grow louder every minute. I saw a house surrounded by snow, and a room with a fire, and chairs

gathered around the hearth. A tear came into my eye. I fought to hold it back. It escaped to roll down my cheek. Burns placed his arm around my shoulder and I felt the pressure of his fingers on my flesh. But I was beyond encouragement. The bunting, which had seemed so gay, became tawdry. Christmas was coming on board and there would be no cheerful greetings, no presents. The day would be like any other day, with watches to be kept and "salt horse" and hard-tack to be eaten.

"The first one is always the worst, Tommy-boy," Burns whispered. "You won't mind the next one so much."

I wondered if he really meant what he said. He didn't seem to be so cheerful. I wished that he had kept the imitation mistletoe suspended from the wire over his head. He could have shaken it and kissed it with exaggerated solemnity, and we should have laughed. I turned to ask him to procure it, but the words never passed my lips.

Outside a squall broke upon the night with a clap like thunder. The *Monarch*, flying light, vibrated throughout her length, and catching the force of the wind full upon the beam, heeled over so heavily to starboard that when we leaped to our feet in consternation, the clatter of dishes breaking in the mess room fell upon our ears.

Clinging to the bunk boards as the vessel came back to an even keel, we listened, gazing at each other. The squall, instead of lessening, increased, and from the wild shrieking it seemed to be tearing through the rigging with the force of a hurricane. The strident blast of a whistle came across the wind.

"Answer it, Percy!" shouted Burns. He turned to Tramer. "Get in next door an' see that everything is secured. It seems to be lastin' too long for a squall." He slapped his hands together. "There may be work to be done!"

"What did I tell you?" sneered Tramer, halting by the door. "Old Boxley will find something with which to knock the holiday on the head. It's about the best thing he can do!"

"Enough of that, Tramer," said Burns, good-naturedly,

"and remember that Santa Claus can cover more distance in a squall than in a calm!"

The door banged back against the deckhouse when it was opened. Percy and Tramer ran out into the night. The wind and rain drove past in a drenching stream. Through it the sea appeared to be a swirling mass of whitecaps on which the steaming light, high up on the mainmast, cast a ghostly glimmer. A sailorman, in oil-skins, lurched along the after well deck, inspecting the hatches to see that the tarpaulins were wedged in the cleats. The topping lifts of the after derricks bellied out to leeward.

Burns ordered me to "chock everything off" in the half deck and was about to step out on deck to close the door when Percy appeared, the rain on his face reflecting the light from the bulkhead lamp and his shirt matted to his body.

"All hands on deck!" he shouted. "Rise an' shine, you lubbers! The bridge awnings must be saved for a better day!"

He swung into the night, shouting: "All hands on deck! All hands on deck!" Burns looked over his shoulder at me, his eyes bright with excitement. "Come on, Tommy-boy," he cried. "Let's go! Keep close on my heels. There's nothin' like a bit o' work to drown the imagination on a Christmas Eve!" He drew off his shirt and threw it on the bunk. He kicked off his shoes. "I'll have a bath, if nothin' else, for Christmas!" he shouted, stepping into the rain. "Come on, Tommy-boy!"

He disappeared to starboard. I drew off my shirt and kicked off my shoes and followed him into the shrieking darkness. The rain, hurtling against my skin, took the breath from me, but before I reached the corner of the deckhouse I was wet all over, my blood tingling with the zest of battle.

Burns was lost in the darkness, but I could hear him singing as he groped his way towards the bridge. I knew that he was encouraging me with his song, and, pulling myself hand over hand along the storm rail, I sang it back to him:



“Sing a hi-shuch-a-honnle !  
Sing a honnle-shuch-a-hi !  
Camlachie, Ecclefechan,  
Auchtermuchty and Mulguy.  
For a big, braw lass  
Came an’ took her right away !  
She was a braw lass,  
A clerk in an of-fice !”

The sailormen clattered up the ladder from the forward well and, coming upon Burns and me standing in the lee of the bridge, singing at the top of our lungs in a futile effort to muffle the wild ravings of the squall, they gathered around and joined in with great gusto.

“Holy jumpin’ hell cats !” bawled a voice from the bridge. “What d’you think this is ? A picnic ? Get up here or, by the Lord Harry, I’ll make you hop to another tune !”

Mr. Boxley was evidently in an ugly mood. I crept deeper into the lee of the deckhouse so that the sailormen might precede me to the bridge. But I needn’t have been timid, for at that moment Mr. Boxley was more interested in saving the canvas from being blown to shreds by the rapacious wind than he was in discovering who had been leading the sailormen in song.

In bare feet he paddled through the water that was rushing back and forth on the slanting bridge, heaping imprecations upon us as the canvas bellied over our heads or flapped in a mad effort to be freed from our restraining fingers.

“Cut the stops, there !” he bellowed. “You haven’t got a knife, eh ? What kind of a sailor d’you think you are ? A flyin’-fish sailor ! Mebbe you’d like to be a passenger an’ be below, lyin’ flat on your back, smokin’ a big cigar. Blast your ugly hide ! Cut it, I told you ! You’re fumblin’ at the knots like an old woman.”

I laughed into the night. The rain beat into my face and lashed my bare body with the sting of a whip, but all the torture in the world could not quell the wild enthusiasm that permeated me or still the song which surged through my head to the lilt of the wind.

Too soon the awnings were furled and stowed away



under the poop. Burns was in the half deck, wiping the water from his body, when I entered.

"What're we going to get?" I asked.

"The Old Man says we're in for a bad gale—a southerly buster, he calls it—an' he's a little bit afraid the old tub won't be able to face into it, light as she is. We'll be safe enough, however, as long as the wind doesn't haul to the eastward an' drive us on to a lee shore. She'll roll her guts out, though, so you'd better nip in next door an' snatch a sleep while you can. Don't forget you've got the first wheel in the morning watch."

"Right-o, Bruce."

I left and went into the port half deck, but not to sleep. No sooner had I lain down on the bunk than the vessel commenced to roll so heavily and so violently that I thought she would turn turtle, but always she came back to an even keel where, for a moment, she would quiver before falling over the other way. Jamming my knees against the bunk board, I hung on, hoping that all would be well.

About six bells Tramer, whom I had not seen since the awnings were furled, came in. He turned up the wick of the lamp and peered between the swinging curtains at me.

"How are you making out?" he asked.

"All right," I replied.

He laughed nervously and stood tense, braced against the wardrobe, as the vessel rolled over on her beam ends. The wood creaked and strained under his weight.

"A jolly Christmas Eve, eh?" he muttered. "You'd better get up and come into the mess room. Most of the afterguard are there, waiting for her to turn over."

"Is . . . is it as bad as that?" I asked.

"It couldn't be worse."

"Where's Burns?" I thought that if he could come in, it would ward off the feeling of apprehension that had clutched upon my heart.

"He's on the bridge . . . at the wheel. The Old Man sent for him an hour ago. It's difficult to keep her to her course."

The deck fell away beneath my feet when I left the bunk

and dropped to it. Clinging with one hand to the settee, I pulled a jersey over my head and followed Tramer to the door, which he held open a crack.

"There's a lee outside," he shouted, without looking back, "but the deck is slippery and wet. Don't miss your footing or you'll slide into the scuppers. The wind might carry you over. It's blowing great guns."

He eased the door open and stepped out. I followed close behind and, reaching out, grasped the upper rail which ran around the after end of the deck. The door banged shut and the darkness closed in with the blackness of the tomb. Around me the storm raged with a terrifying intensity. I clung to the rail, afraid to loosen my grip and follow Tramer into the alleyway from which the mess room opened. A dollop of spray flung over the vessel and fell cold upon my face. I shivered, came back to life, and inch by inch fought my way into the alleyway.

Mr. Selkirk was sitting on the mess room settee, with his knees braced against the table and a pipe hanging from the corner of his mouth. Beside him were the second and third engineers. Percy lay stretched out on the deck, his head resting on the dirty, snarled cotton of a mop. By the door stood Tramer, holding on to the sink. All had their eyes shut, as though deep in sleep. I found a corner near the head of the table and sank down on to it.

It was much better in the mess room than in the half deck, although the air was oppressive and laden with the hot odours from the engine room. I grew calm and fell into a troubled slumber.

I wakened to hear the heavy tread of sea boots in the alleyway and, opening my eyes, I saw Burns framed in the doorway, a grin on his face, which was red beneath his dripping sou'wester.

"Ho! There! You sleepers!" he bellowed, thumping on the bulkhead with his fist. Weary eyes looked up at him. He went on: "The Old Man sent me down to tell you to get everything secured. It's useless to try an' keep her up into the wind. He's going to stop the engines an'

let her drift beam on to the sea. Get everything secured ! You haven't seen anything yet !"

He waved a hand to me and, with a cheery "Yo ! Ho ! Sailors," turned around and swung along the alleyway to the deck. I listened until the sound of his footsteps was smothered by the tumult of the gale.

Mr. Selkirk opened his eyes and, perceiving that I was watching him, he winked deliberately and shut them again, settling down more comfortably on the settee. No one else stirred. They concluded, I believe, that everything was secured.

The engines wheezed to a stop. I clutched the table, fearful of what might happen when the vessel fell beam on to the sea. Soon the rolling became more violent and I felt sure that the funnel and masts would be shaken out of her. The wind rose to a wild screeching. The seas flung against the slanting hull with terrifying force, which staggered the vessel so that she laboured and strained. Spray after spray fell upon the deck above our heads.

Eight bells struck at midnight. The second mate and the third engineer left the mess room to relieve the watches. I listened for the tread of sea boots in the alleyway. Soon I heard it, swinging along. Burns came in, to stand in the doorway surveying us all, while a pool of water formed around his feet from his dripping oilskins.

"Gosh ! What a night !" he shouted, with a joviality that brought all eyes to him. "And Christmas is here ! Merry Christmas to you all."

"Merry hell," Tramer growled.

"A Merry Christmas, say I !" returned Burns, shaking his oilskin, which he had taken off, so that the water fell on everyone. "Cast off the gloom, my brothers, for Christmas is here an' the back of the storm is broken !"

He dropped his oilskin and sou'wester into a corner and, sitting down beside me, he placed an arm around my shoulders and said :

"A song, Tommy-boy ! Let's have a song. One of those Christmas things to cheer up this crowd. You'd think they were a bunch o' hoodlums instead of being

deep-water sailormen, same as you an' me. Sing out, Tommy-boy, until the screechin' of the gale is lost in the harmonious howl of blue-water men!"

His mood was infectious. I sang a carol. Everyone joined in. The spirit of Christmas crept into the mess room.



## CHAPTER IX

### A RESCUE

WHEN Tramer called me at one bell, I rose quickly from the bunk on which I lay and, leaving the half deck, walked over to the lee bulwark, where I sprawled, with my elbows spread out on the rail, to watch the passing of the gale while the wind blew the cobwebs from my muddled brain. It had been almost two o'clock in the morning when the singsong in the mess room had ended and, after chatting with Burns for a few minutes, I had turned in. It would have been better, I thought, if I had remained up, for the *Monarch*, now on her course, was tumbling about with a peculiar corkscrew motion that was distressingly enervating. Certainly there was nothing Christmassy about it! The air was warm, and the sailormen coming off watch hurried along the deck in silence, as though eager to get out of sight and into their wet bunks before Mr. Boxley could come from his cabin and give them something to do.

Paddy Doyle was at the wheel. He relinquished it to me.

"Merry Christmas t' ye, lad," he said, "an' she's headin' sou'-b'-east-a-quarter-east."

He was gone, clattering down the ladder before I could return his greeting or repeat the course. Perhaps he hadn't been able to sleep when the gale was at its height, I thought. He might have waited, though, until I could have cleared the lump from my throat. But how was he to know that I had that morning-after feeling?

Mr. Boxley came into the wheelhouse to light his pipe. In the flare of the match I saw his eyes fixed on me. The swinging compass card took all my attention!

When his pipe was well lighted, he straightened up and, laying one hand on the Flinder's bar to steady himself, peered out of the window. One bell, at half-past

four, struck before he moved ; then, squinting over his shoulder, he grunted :

"What's the matter with your tongue, boy ? Don't you know what day this is ?"

"It's Christmas, sir," I answered, amazed at his questions.

"Well . . . don't they teach you manners at school nowadays ?"

"Yes, sir. A Merry Christmas, sir," said I quickly.

"That's better !" He moved towards the door, pulling strongly at his pipe. With one foot on the bridge he paused and, leaning against the door jamb, said : "A Merry Christmas, boy, an' may you have few like last night."

With the coming of daylight, the weather did not seem so bad. The sea was still streaked with wind dogs ; the wind, which was fitful, falling away almost to a calm between the squalls, still sang through the shrouds with a piercing note ; but the waves leaped with less force and their crests, when they broke, became a smother of foam with no weight behind it. The vessel behaved better in the seaway, with less pounding of her bows on the precipitous combers, with more period to her roll, and I kept her to her course with only a spoke or two of the wheel.

The odour of kindling came from the galley and I had begun steering by the clock, counting the minutes as they were slowly ticked off, when the lookout man, who was stationed on the starboard wing of the bridge, lurched past the wheelhouse windows and halted behind Mr. Boxley.

"Sir," he rumbled, deep down in his throat ; and when Mr. Boxley glanced over his shoulder, he touched the brim of his sou'wester with a respectful finger and reported : "There's something off the starboard bow, sir."

"There's what ?" barked Mr. Boxley, turning his gaze in the direction indicated.

"It looks like a wreck, sir !"

The words, entering the wheelhouse on the swirling wind, filled me with a wild excitement. I craned my

neck over the binnacle. The canvas dodger obscured my view. I glanced at the clock. It was five minutes to six. I assumed an attitude of unconcern as Mr. Boxley stumped into the wheelhouse, muttering angrily under his breath.

"Port two points!" he snapped.

"Port two points, sir!" I answered and whirled the wheel around. The vessel commenced to swing closer into the eye of the wind.

"Steady her now!" Mr. Boxley ordered, when a little more than a point had been traversed. "Can't you see where you're goin'?" I steadied the vessel up while he picked up the binoculars from the table and looked through them, fine on the starboard bow. A volley of oaths rolled from his tongue. He swung on me. "Did you ever see the like o' it?" he demanded, a truculent glint in his eyes. "And Christmas Day too! Why the devil couldn't they pick another day on which to be shipwrecked?" He extracted the plug from the speaking-tube and blew down with such violence that I thought the captain, who was sleeping below, would be blown from his bunk. "There's a wreck out here!" he bellowed, when a drowsy voice wafted up the tube. The captain spoke. He listened intently. "Yes, sir. On stand by, sir. All hands on deck. Yes, sir!" He snapped the plug back and, rolling the quid around in his mouth, he walked out on to the bridge and swung the handles of the engine-room telegraph to "stand by". Then he ordered the lookout man to go below and call all hands.

I struck four bells, and when relieved from the wheel hurried to the deck below, where, from the lee corner of the deckhouse, I peered ahead.

Two miles or less away was a small sailing vessel. She was lying so far over on her beam ends and falling so heavily into the troughs of the seas that at first there were times when it seemed as if she had gone for good. Then she would heave up on to the crest of a wave, to be smothered by the spume as the wind-hounded combers raced, pinnaced, and broke over her. It seemed incredible that a living person could find a shelter on that straining wood, yet when the *Monarch*, spray flying like a plume



over her fore-castle head, bore down on her, there was a flutter of a white sheet from behind the stump of the main-mast, and from the fore truck flew the remnants of a flag.

"Ye'd better muster the men on the bridge deck, on the lee side near the fiddley, Mister. I'll ha'e a wee talk wi' them. It'll be a ticklish business."

Captain McFarlane was standing on the ladder leading up to the flying bridge, with his greatcoat pulled on over his pyjamas and a pair of carpet slippers on his feet. Mr. Boxley was above him, one eye on the captain, the other cocked ahead.

"Aye! Aye, sir!" he said. "You'll send the third mate in charge? He's young an' not a married man."

Captain McFarlane nodded absent-mindedly.

"Ay! Mister, I'll send him," he said. "Stop her to windward o' the wreck. I'll awa' doon."

I hesitated no longer. Running around the weather side of the deckhouse, I slid down the handrails of the ladder to the deck below and in a jiffy reached the half deck as Burns and Percy emerged, each carrying a lifebelt.

"We're going to launch a boat!" I cried.

Burns looked at Percy and winked.

"Can you imagine anyone gettin' so excited over a little thing like that?" he asked.

Percy shook his head and commenced to fit the lifebelt over his shoulder. "He's young, Bruce," he explained. "And anyway, he doesn't have to risk his neck."

"But I want to go," I shouted.

Burns linked his arm through mine as we walked around the deck towards the lee side of the fiddley.

"You'll have to see Old Boxley about that," he said. "But I wouldn't try to go, if I were you, Tommy-boy. Your turn will come . . . when you get older. You're a little too young to feed the fishes. They like tough flesh on which to sharpen their teeth. Feel that!"

He flexed his right arm and held it in front of me. I pushed it away.

"I wish you wouldn't laugh at me," I protested. "I really want to go."

"We're not laughing at you, Tommy-boy. But it's a



man's work out there," he nodded to seawards where the wreck was floundering in the trough, "an' there's always a chance that we'll all be drowned. It's just as important to have good men left behind to work the vessel back to port as it is to send them away. Your duty is here. An' if we get a bit of salvage, you'll get a share. A Christmas box from the sea!" He laughed and squeezed my arm and went on: "An' anyway, Tommy-boy, you can't go, for you haven't got a lifebelt. A sailorman can't be drowned without a cork wreath around his rum-i-tum-tum."

It was too late to run back to the half deck. We were in the lee of the fiddley beside the sailormen, who were stripped to the waist, with only the lifebelts covering their hairy chests.

Captain McFarlane came slowly along the deck, his carpet slippers swish-swishing through the surging water, and stopped with his back to the bulwark rail when he was abreast of his crew. For a moment or two he looked from one to the other, all along the line, while the fine spray, carried on the swirling wind, settled like dewy pearls on his grey beard.

"Men," he began quietly, his steadfast gaze seeming to rest on each and every man, "I want a boat's crew. The wee vessel oot yonder canna last much longer. There's bodies on her seekin' help. It will be dangerous work, hard work, and ye may lose your lives. I want volunteers. Ye might step forward, the men who are willin' tae tak' a chance."

The sailormen looked at each other. One stepped forward—another—another. Burns prodded me with his thumb, urging me to follow him into the line of the men. I did. I had hesitated, rooted to the deck with the simplicity of the captain's words. They were his crew, his children, and he was sending them, perhaps, to their deaths.

He held up his hand as the last man stepped forward. "Thank ye, laddies," he said and swallowed hard. "Ye're a credit tae the sea." He turned to the third mate, who was standing beside him at the rail. "Pick your crew,

Mr. Slater. Seven men is all ye need." He nodded towards me and went on, "Dinna tak' the laddie there. He's a wee bit young." He swung towards the sailormen again. "Best of luck tae ye, laddies. I'll help ye a' I can."

He smiled benignly and went off towards the bridge. Mr. Slater stepped out from the rail, his gaze appraising the men. He said quickly, to smother nervousness :

"All right, McCarthy ! You come along. And you, Burns, Hall, Doyle, Creed. You'd better remain to lower us away, Bos'n. You, Grimstead—Sawyer."

In the wink of an eye he had a crew. "Clear away the port lifeboat !" he sang out.

Mr. Boxley came from the bridge towards him, holding up his hand. "The Old Man wants to give you some advice, Mister. I'll make everything ready."

Mr. Slater went on to the bridge. Mr. Boxley turned aft, his oilskin flapping around his legs like a black skirt. I followed in the wake of the sailormen, up the iron ladder to the boat deck, so thrilled that my feet barely touched the rungs. In an incredibly short time the lifeboat was freed from its gripes, swung outboard, and lowered to the deck below, where it was held, boused in against the stanchions to keep it from being smashed against the side as the vessel rolled. The crew clambered on board.

"Stand by to lower away !" bellowed Mr. Boxley, as the third mate was seen to leave the captain's side. He turned to me. "You stand by to slip the forrard lashin' . . . an' slip it quick, when I give the word. I'm going above !"

He swung away towards the iron ladder leading to the boat deck. The sailormen picked up their oars. Burns yelled out : "So long, Tommy-boy !" I waved to him and looked away. I didn't want to see him go ; I wanted to be with him.

A clatter on the iron deck drew my attention in the direction of the bridge. Mr. Slater was rolling head over heels into the scuppers, where he lay as though stunned, the water lapping over him.

"The third mate ! The third mate !" I cried.

Mr. Boxley paused, half-way up the iron ladder, looked forward over his shoulder, and swore lustily. "Never mind him!" he bellowed. "He's a useless article if ever there was one! Let him lie! Stand by the lashing!" Reaching the boat deck, he curled his right arm around the forward davit and looked down into the boat. "Take charge, Burns," he shouted, "an' make a good job of it or don't come back! Stand by to lower away!"

Burns dropped his oar and leaped into the stern sheets. I saw him look at me, a fleeting glance, but it was enough.

"Clear away!" Captain McFarlane shouted peremptorily.

"Ready there?" inquired Mr. Boxley.

"All ready, sir," Burns answered, nodding to his men.

"Cast off the line!" sang out Mr. Boxley. "Lower away!"

I cast off the bousing lashing. The falls grunted over the sheaves. The lifeboat sank below the level of the rail. I caught Burns's eye. He winked ever so slightly. Vaulting over the bulwark, I dropped, with fear stifled in my heart, into the bow of the descending boat.

The air fairly vibrated with the volley of oaths that issued from Mr. Boxley's mouth. He shook his fist. He stamped along the deck between the davits, his face purple and inflated like a balloon about to burst. "Wait!" he screamed. "Wait!"

I controlled a fiendish impulse to wave my hand to him. I believe I would have, but looking down I saw the water, as great smooth swells, leap up to grasp the boat. "Stand by to cut the painter, Tommy-boy! Stand by the releasing gear, Percy!" Burns shouted, as he took into his hands the sweep with which to steer the boat. "Push her off there! Get the lee oars out! Have the others handy!"

Men obeyed silently. The pulleys sang. A wave kissed the bottom of the boat—kissed it gently and went past. Burns watched anxiously as the boat swung out on its tackles. A wave heaved up!

"Let go!"

A swing of the releasing lever and the lower tackle



blocks swung free with an ominous clatter. The lifeboat took the water with a splash, sheering out from the hull.

"Cut her adrift, Tommy-boy!"

The order was like music to my ears. There was no fear in my thoughts, only a joy which knew no danger.

A slash of the axe! The painter parted with a twang, the freed end curling like a snake. Burns lay heavily on the sweep to head the lifeboat farther off to leeward before the indraught should draw her to destruction against the rolling hull of the vessel.

"Give way!" he shouted.

The sailormen bent on their oars, lay back, and before they had settled to their task, the lifeboat was out of the lee and speeding before the storm. Seas leaped at us, broke, and covered us with spray. Foam broke before the bow in a speckled ruffle. But the boat was lively, buoyant, and took no heavy water.

A tremor of excitement or of fear passed through me as I crouched down in the bow and gazed ahead as we approached the wreck. The going had not seemed very bad, but now, with the wreck close aboard, the waves breaking over her heavily-listed hull, it did not seem so good. There was no oil on the water to smooth our landing; there were no men ready to aid us. It was like being driven helplessly against the cliffs—with the seething waters eager to engulf our boat.

Nearer and nearer we drew, distance being devoured by ravenous seconds. A comber broke, raced along the run, drenching us with spray.

Burns kept the boat heading for the stern of the helpless hull. He must keep her as near as possible—but not too near. There was a possibility of being swept past, when all the will and energy in the world could not achieve a rescue.

The wreck disappeared in a trough. I could hear the water breaking—see the foam reaching far on all sides. The wreck rose up on a crest. There was no sign of life on her. She could not be more than fifty feet away. The boat was flying down on her. I held my breath. Burns had her in too close. She would not clear!



A wave caught the boat on its crest and sent it forward at great speed.

"Look out!" Burns yelled and lay heavily on his sweep. "Pull like hell!"

The lifeboat swerved in time. She was abreast of the stern. She was lifted to the level of the poop on a sea. Burns pulled on the sweep. The lifeboat sped to leewards in safety, and at a word of command the sailormen lay to on their oars about thirty feet away from the wreck and just beyond the masts and spars which floated in a tangled mess.

I breathed more easily and rose up in the bow. Men, dark-skinned men, were clinging to a rope stretched in the lee of a small house on the poop. The breaking waves were tumbling over them and falling in an avalanche into the sea.

"Give way easily!" Burns ordered.

The lifeboat moved forward. When almost upon the floating wreckage, Burns ordered the men to stop rowing and keep the boat head on to the swell, in readiness to pull away should the suction draw them too close. He laid down the sweep and cupped his hands around his mouth.

"You'll have to jump into the sea an' swim for it!" he shouted. "We'll float lines. Make for them, an' we'll pull you on board. Be as quick as you can. There's a shift of wind coming!" His gaze dropped down to me. "Strut the hero stuff, Tommy-boy! Grab them from the sea!"

I lay flat on my stomach up in the bow, stretched my arms to make sure that I could reach the water, then looked towards the wreck. Three men, naked as the day on which they were born, yelled something I could not understand and, leaping into the sea, swam towards us with easy, powerful strokes. In a minute they were through the treacherous wreckage; in another they were alongside and, grinning from ear to ear as if it were a gala day, they grasped the rope beackets and clambered on board.

"Captin! Captin! He come!" one of them shouted



THE WRECK ROSE UP ON A CREST



and, without waiting for the word of command, they all sat on the thwarts alongside the sailormen and double-banked the oars.

"Pay attention to your job!" snapped Burns.

Guiltily I looked towards the wreck. For a moment I had been fascinated by the appearance and behaviour of the dark-skinned men, who, instead of being scared to death, were as happy as deep-water sailormen on leave.

On the deck of the wreck stood a white man, fully clothed, even to a hat. On either side of him, holding his arms, were two men similar in appearance to those who had come into the boat. As I watched, they all leaped into the sea and there the dark-skinned men swam close to the white man, carrying him through the tumbling water as though he were a child. Time and again they all disappeared beneath the waves, but always they reappeared and each time nearer to the boat.

At last, when they were near the bow, a breaking wave flung over them, hurling them forward at a terrific speed. I thought they would be carried past. Yelling my consternation to Burns, I reached down. The water leaped up into my face as the bow sank heavily. But my fingers touched cloth. Bracing my knee against the gunwale I held on, breathing deeply.

Simultaneously, as though from a jack-in-the-box, three heads appeared above the surface, close beneath mine.

"Aye! Aye!" sang out the dark-skinned men and, with a flick of their feet, they swerved away like two sharks and swam towards the stern of the boat.

The cheeks of the white man blew out like a balloon, and as he shook his head, a stream of water spouted from his mouth as if from a miniature fountain. His eyes opened and looked up at me. They were a faded blue, but in each of them there dwelt a mischievous imp which the salt water could not tame.

"Hu! Hu!" he gasped and his cheeks blew out again. "Hullo! Santa Claus!"

Flabbergasted, I almost let him go. He swung around in my grasp like a carcass suspended from a butcher's



hook, and it was all I could do to hold on to him, so heavily did he weigh.

"G—give me a hand!" I blurted out, twisting around and glancing aft.

Two of the dark-skinned men jumped up on to the thwarts, leaped forward with the agility of monkeys, and, dropping down in the bow beside me, hauled the white man over the gunwale into the boat, where he sat on the water breaker, inspecting us each in turn. Suddenly he laughed out loud and, smacking his knee with a force that shook the boat to its timbers, he cried :

"Gad! This is the life! Snatched from the sea by Santa Claus, who has left his whiskers at home! Christmas! Life! Santa Claus without whiskers! The boys in Katie's Bar will roar at that!" He waved, in high humour, to Burns. "Get the sea sleigh moving, Santa. It's tired I am of schooners an' my belly's got the willies, an' it's crying out for a slug of rotgut rum!"

A deluge of rain came. Burns cast his eyes around the horizon, which was being quickly shut in by a black squall that was making up. A long blast on the whistle of the *Monarch*, which Captain McFarlane had taken down to leeward, came against the wind like the moo of a cow calling its calf from danger.

"Give way together!" Burns shouted. "There's a shift coming!"

The wind fell light as the sailormen laid back on their oars. A contrary eddy ruffled the surface of the sea. The sky darkened. A dark line raced down from the horizon.

"Lay back on the oars!" Burns yelled, sculling with the sweep to aid the speed of the boat.

The white stranger clapped his hands loudly. His head shot forward. He bellowed: "On the oars, you black rascals! Santa Claus has one more call to make!" And when his men double-banked the oars, he roared and laughed and slapped the men who were nearest him on the back.

I thought at times that he was crazy, but there was so much sanity about his boisterousness that I concluded that he was just happy to be saved. Yet when the squall

struck the boat and Burns yelled: "More weight on the oars!" and he laughed and shouted: "Take it easy, Santa. There's a devil in the wind an' a devil in the sea, but never a devil will get you or me!" I couldn't be quite sure. I crept farther away from him, up into the bow.

The wind was blowing in fierce gusts, driving the rain into our faces, when Burns worked the boat alongside the *Monarch* and, without mishap, held her there until the tackles were hooked on and she was hove on board.

Captain McFarlane was on the boat deck. He took Burns by the hand.

"Ye did a fine job, laddie!"

Burns blushed, mumbled, and would have turned away, but the white stranger stepped forward and, bowing first to Burns and then to the captain, shouted at the top of his voice:

"Gentlemen! I am Captain James McTurk. These black rascals—all Kanakas—my crew." He grandiloquently swept an arm through the air. "We have shared, these many years, the tortures of the damned, but never have we been rescued on a Christmas Day." He bowed again. "We thank you for the experience and," he faced Burns, "I will make a call upon Santa Claus before the day is out!"

Captain McFarlane smiled kindly and invited him along to the cabin, after ordering Mr. Boxley to see that the rescued men were cared for.

"What d'you think he'll want to see you for?" I asked Burns on our way to the half deck.

"I dunno, Tommy-boy. Perhaps it'll be to bum a shirt an' a pair of trousers. Those South Sea Island birds are all of a feather. They'll kiss a girl, bum a drink, an' steal your eye teeth without so much as 'by your leave'."

"But he doesn't seem like that," I protested.

"You're right there," he agreed. "Perhaps he's goin' to make me king of a cannibal island!"

"Hmm! That would be great!"

## CHAPTER X

### THE STRANGER SPINS A YARN

IN the rain-washed twilight the sea gave way to a monotony of sleek-bosomed swells over which the *Monarch* rode with a proud lift to her bluff bows and a clatter of her stern, as the propeller cleared the water in a fury of churning foam. The stars came out, one by one, peeping brilliantly between the rifts in the clouds that were rolling up in dark, grey layers in readiness to be stowed away in the secret cupboards of the sky. A sliver of moon, for one awestruck moment, like a ship afire, flirted with the western horizon and, all too soon, disappeared.

On the forward well deck the sailormen, warmed with a glass of grog issued at supper time, sang and danced to the music of an accordion which one of them played as he sat straddle-legged on the hatch, with a far-away look in his eyes.

Leaning on the forward rails of the bridge deck in the shadow of the saloon, I listened to them for a while, and then, walking aft, I entered the starboard half deck. Supper, which had been of dried hash and canned peaches, was over, and Burns, a little wearied, sat on the small settee with his legs bent up and his chin resting on his knees. Percy lay stretched out on his bunk, dreamily gazing at smoke rings he blew from his mouth. I sat down on the step and sank into a reverie in which the events of the day were veiled in a glamorous mist. The rescue had been so vivid and complete that it left behind an emptiness, a listless vacuity, as though it had been nothing more than a dream. Yet it was a reality, for I had seen the five Kanakas dancing with the sailormen on the forward deck, and in the saloon, so the chief steward whispered as I walked past, Captain James McTurk sat on the right hand of our captain, drinking deeply from a bottle of rum which lay on the table between them.

"'E's a queer one," the chief steward had said, "with a desert thirst on 'im. 'Is legs, they must be 'oller with a 'ole bored in 'is big toe for the liquor to run hout of. 'E's talkin' loud an' through 'is 'at. D'ye 'ear 'im, lad." I had stepped inside the door and listened. Captain McTurk was shouting: "I tell you, sir, there's wealth in a wreck. Ha! Ha! Ha!" He laughed so heartily I thought that he was in his cups, but his voice sobered up as he went on: "Wealth for the likes o' me, who's nothing better than a scavenger of the seas. You're different, Captain, honourable and a gentleman. I drink good health to you!"

Queer he might be, thought I, but brave too, with a hint of madness in his pale blue eyes which were seldom still, as if there was much for them to see and too little time in which to see it. Sitting on the doorstep, I tried to reconstruct his life, sailing with him into the quiet solitudes of the atolls of the romantic South Seas.

I must have sighed, for Burns looked up and asked: "Where away, Tommy-boy? Are you a pirate, a rogue, or just a boy?"

I blushed and answered: "I don't know. I . . . I was just thinking."

"We're all thinkin' too much," he said wistfully, "an' thinkin's bad on a day like this. Hop in next door an' ask Tramer to bring in his mandolin an' give us a tune. Nothing like music to give you the dumps—or cheer you up."

I rose to go but halted, with my hand on the door hook, when Percy rose up on his bunk and asked:

"Where's he been all day?"

"Tramer, d'you mean?"

"Yes."

"I don't know. Keepin' out o' sight. He doesn't believe in working on Christmas. Against his religion or something. He'll get over it, though. Only the very young can afford to have opinions."

"Hmm."

Percy lay down again and I went into the port half deck. Tramer agreed to come with an alacrity foreign to



him. He was a strange chap, living, most of the time, within himself and finding little of happiness there. Now he avoided my eyes, but when he brushed his hair, which he was always doing, there was reflected in the mirror a wistful face that drew from me :

"I wish you had been with us to-day, John. It was simply spiffing. Perhaps there'll be another wreck."

"There'll never be another," he blurted out. "I'll never get a chance."

There was nothing more that I could say. I stood by the door until he procured his mandolin and then accompanied him into the starboard half deck, where Burns invited him to sit up on his bunk. When he was comfortably settled and the strings all tuned up, Burns said :

"Give us 'Phil the Fluter's Ball'. You know, the thing that goes like," and he sang :

"With a toot an' a flute,  
An' a hi-diddle-diddle-i ;  
Swingin' roun' an' roun' aboot,  
An' up an' down the middle-i.  
Up, down, hands around,  
Across unto the wall ;  
Oh ! Hadn't we the gaiety  
At Phil, the fluter's, ball !"

Tramer nodded and was about to play the tune when the door was flung back on its hinges and Captain James McTurk, swaying on his feet, stood peering in for a moment ; then, with a grunt of satisfaction, stepped over the washboard.

"By the left limb of Satan !" he bellowed. "I've found you. It's dark as the hobs of Hades but there was a light ! A light, an' says I to myself, says I : 'Where there's a light, there's a house an', mebbe', says I, 'there'll be a welcome for one who is lost on the moor'."

He clung to the bunkboard and glared at us each in turn. His sun-bronzed face, indistinctly lit by the flickering light of the bulkhead lamp, was drunkenly grave. In one of Captain McFarlane's uniforms, which was much too small for him, and with his hair dishevelled, he cut a ludicrous figure, yet there was a fire in his eyes which

commanded silence. His gaze came to rest on Tramer.

"Ho—o !" he exclaimed, and he looked us over once again, his right forefinger counting. "So there's more than three of you. Or am I seeing things ?"

"There are four of us, sir," Burns stated.

"Don't sir me, Santa," he cried. "I'm in your debt, and until I am out of it, you have the honour to be sirred." Again he faced Tramer and asked : "Where did you spring from ? I didn't see you in the boat, nor were you on the deck when I came on board, nor have I heard mention of you in the saloon."

Tramer's lips curled in a sneer. He half-rose from the bunk but settled back again as if enchained by the captain's stare. His hands clenched until the knuckles were blatched with white.

"You have no tongue, eh ?" Captain McTurk growled and looked around inquiringly.

"He wasn't on deck," Percy said. "He doesn't believe in working on a holiday. You see, to-day is Christmas."

"Holy jumpin' bedbugs !" boomed Captain McTurk. "Conditions must have changed. When I went first to sea, it was jump ! jump ! an inch ahead of a belayin' pin ! Holidays are for landlubbers ! They can seep their heads in them until their brains are soft. It's work for the likes o' you and me. Work on Sundays and Christmases, and holidays only when you die." He passed the back of his hand across his mouth and continued in a subdued tone : "But I was like that once. I thought I had rights. I didn't know that before you can command, you must learn to obey," his voice boomed out as he thumped himself on the chest, "until I became Captain James McTurk, a roisterin' scalawag of the South Seas. Sense came to me when it was too late. One day . . . but let me sit down. I'm brimful to the gunwale with rum and it'll be sloppin' over. It would be a shame to waste the water of oblivion."

Burns rose from the settee and sat down on the floor with his back against my legs. Captain James McTurk took his place, settling himself comfortably in the angle of the wardrobe and the bulkhead.

"It's a story of a fight," he began, rolling the words

around in his mouth, and then he fell silent. His eyes looked at the door and beyond it to a distant place where dwelt the memory of a bloody fight. Suddenly he smacked his lips with relish and, fixing us each in turn with a bold scrutiny, he went on :

"Once upon a time there was an old hooker, a pearlin' schooner, and she had two masters, Captain Jim Ballast, a Kanaka, and myself. It was share an' share alike until one night, on an atoll off the Society group, I thought that I had more right to what we had than Jim. You see, the old hooker was wrecked an' only we two were saved. We two and a bag of pearls that I had put into my pocket, hoping to get away with it without him knowing. But he knew, and as we sat there on the beach, shooing off the giant crabs that have claws so strong they can break the bone of a finger like you can a match, he says : 'Captin, it's share an' share alike,' and I answers : 'Savin' 's keep-in's.' For a long while he was silent and then he says : 'Captin, I'm figurin' on killin' ye,' and I told him that I was planning to do the same to him. 'We'd better be settin' to,' says he, getting on his feet and peeling the singlet from off his back in ragged pieces like it was an orange. I saw he meant business so I stood up and did the same. 'Ye'd better place the pearls in a safe place,' says he. 'T'd better,' says I, an' taking them from my pocket, I laid them, tied up in a little canvas bag, on a rotten log that lay upon the beach. 'Are ye ready?' says he. 'Ready,' says I, crouchin' down with the glint of murder in my eye and walking around."

Captain McTurk fell silent. He had come out of the corner between the wardrobe and the bulkhead, and now, with his fists resting on his knees, he continued, his voice cracking like distant thunder :

"What a night ! Moonlight on the lagoon . . . surf rumbling on the reef . . . a white scar on the night . . . the lap-lapping of water on the beach . . . the wind sighing through the rustling fronds . . . the crabs crackling as they scurried to cover . . . an' Captain Jim an' me puffing an' blowing an' fighting to the death. I bettered him ! Aye ! I laid him out on the soft white sand, but



when I went to seek the pearls they were gone ! I thought that he had tricked me and, in the vehemence of my wrath, I picked up a rock to smash his head to pulp. But he looked so peaceful, lying there with the moonlight glistening on his face, that the anger passed from an', sinking to the sand, I bathed his brow with water. It didn't seem quite right that we should have been fighting. I had thought that because I was white, the pearls should be mine." He glared at each of us again. "But what right had I to them ? It was a fifty-fifty proposition, share an' share alike. He didn't come around an' I sat there thinking, far into the night, but when the dawn was in the sky, he stirred an' says, 'The pearls are yours. It was a clean fight.' He shamed me with his words. I felt like crying, but instead I says : 'They're lost, Jim.' He takes my hand an' shakes it ; then, without another word, we built a fire near the edge of the lagoon, an' there, scattered on the sand, were the pearls. The crabs had stolen the bag an' ripped it open. Stooping down, I picked them up an' saying : 'Here you are, Jim,' I held them out to him. 'It's share an' share alike,' says he. And so it was. Here's what is left of them."

In his hand, which he opened slowly, lay three pearls, pale bluish-grey, like drops of water in the flickering light. We craned our necks the better to look at them.

He went on : "You cannot get without giving. On the beach that night I got sense and a madness too. For both I am grateful, although the one runs contrary to the other. I should have sold my share of the pearls, but I kept them . . . to give away to those who are more worthy of them than I. I brought them here to give to those who were in the boat. You gave me life. But now I find that there are more of you. . . ."

"But . . ." interrupted Percy.

Captain James McTurk held up his hand for silence. He seemed to have become sober.

"I know what you were goin' to say," he exclaimed, a tolerant smile lighting up his pale blue eyes, "but it's better left unsaid. Remember, this is Christmas an' that Santa Claus can favour none."



He sank within his thoughts. Suddenly he rose to his feet and picked his way across the cabin. At the door he halted and turned around.

"It'll be share an' share alike," he cried. "I'll give them to your captain an' he can sell them an' divide the money among you all. There will be no arguments . . . or fights. Fight! By the left limb of Satan! What's better than a fight? A fight in the moonlight an' the crabs running frightened on the sand!" He shook his fists above his head. He stepped through the doorway and lurched off to starboard, shouting: "A fight! A fight in the moonlight!"

We looked at each other when he had gone.

"He's a queer duck," said Burns, rising from the floor and sitting again on the settee.

"I wonder if he'll really give the pearls to the captain?" said Percy.

"I'm sure he will," said I.

"If you think so, he will," shouted Burns. "An' it won't have been such a bad Christmas, after all. Tune up your mandolin, Tramer, an' give us 'Oh! Fetch a mundy hammer, there's a thought within my head.'" He leaned forward and, imitating Captain James McTurk, cried: "A fight! No! A holiday! A holiday in the moonlight and a fat girl on my knee!"

## CHAPTER XI

### HOMEWARD BOUND

"IT seems only yesterday that we left Melbourne," I shouted above the piping of the wind.

"It's always the same when you're homeward bound, Tommy-boy," Burns shouted back. "Somethin' gets into the air. The old-timers call it homeward-bound fever. I think they're right. It makes you wobbly inside, an' you work harder to throw it off, an' the time just skips along. D'you feel all right?"

I nodded and clutched more tightly to the rail before me. He chuckled deep down in his throat and shook the water from his eyes, as the *Monarch*, deep-laden with a cargo of grain, shuddered throughout her ancient frame, staggered onward as the weight of a thirty-foot wave raised her stern high into the air; then, as if exhausted by the rude assault of the elements, hesitated a moment before burying her bow in the trough of a receding sea.

"The dirt hangs on, Bruce," I shouted, turning slightly towards him.

"It does that, Tommy-boy," he returned, "but let it hang! What do we care? Just think that one more day will find us safe in port after eight months o' trampin' the seas. I've got money in my pocket, thanks to Captain James McTurk. D'you remember the day he came down before we sailed from Melbourne? Gosh! He was drunk. But he didn't forget. 'Here, Santa,' says he. 'Here's a reward. Take it an' be damned to ye.' An' away he went up the wharf, as if the devils were after him. Thanks to him, I'll be able to sit for a ticket, Tommy-boy, an' when I step on a deck again, it'll be as a blinkin' officer, with gold upon m' sleeve an' a bark in m' throat!"

"Yes, it's all right for you," I admitted dolefully, "but I've done nothing yet."

"Nothin'!" he cried, grasping my arm and swinging

me around until my face was close to his. "What are you talkin' about? For a first voyager, you've had the experiences of a lifetime. An' think of it? In one more day you'll be able to go home an' tell the folks all about it. An' I wish that I could be under the table to hear you tell it."

I wished, too, that he could be there. I wished even more that he could remain on board until my apprenticeship was over. He had an outlook on life which I found stimulating and to which I wanted to cling until the deck would be firm under my feet and I would be confident of carrying on alone. Nothing seemed to faze him. Not even the foul weather, which had encompassed the *Monarch* for a week or more, or the double watches, four hours on and four hours off, which had been set on our approach to the land, could dull the exuberance of his high spirits. Work to be done efficiently, he would often tell me, must be done with a will. There was little of comfort in that for me, knowing, as I did, that the voyage was about over and he would be leaving.

In the first dogwatch, sea duds had been stowed away and shore-going clothes laid out in every cabin. In the forecandle the sailormen packed their bags ready for an immediate departure as soon as the vessel docked. The discomforts and grievances nursed throughout the long voyage were being packed away with the soiled clothes. To-morrow was pay day! What did it matter then if the chief steward had starved them so that a room could be added to his house with the money he had made? What did it matter if the mate had worked them like dogs? One more night of discomfort and then the fleeting joys of the harbour lights. One more day!

From the forecandle the voice of McCarthy came against the wind:

"Don't ye hear the mate a-bawlin' ?

One more day !

Oh ! Come rock an' roll me over.

One more day !

Don't ye hear the gals a-callin' ?

One more day."

"D'you hear them?" I asked. "They're happy up there."

"They're queer, Tommy-boy. Happy when they're leavin' a vessel an' happy when they're joinin' another. For a little while the shore seems like paradise to them . . . but only for a little while. There's no discipline there an' they need it."

The vessel staggered and rolled dangerously to port as a wave came up on the quarter and, with a roar, raced along the hull to spill green on to the forward well. We clutched at the rails in front of us. The driving spray eddied around our faces.

"It seems to be getting worse," I shouted, wiping the stinging salt from my eyes. "I wonder the Old Man doesn't ease her down."

"He can't!" Burns yelled in my ear. "I heard Old Boxley saying that the Old Man got a message at Madeira to make all the speed possible. There's another charter waitin'. We're late now. What with all the dirty weather an' barnacles on her bottom as big as eggs, I don't envy the Old Man a bit. He's been up there," he inclined his head towards the bridge, "without his clothes off for almost a week. You know what that means. He's wearin' himself out but he must keep on. The sea demands it! The owners demand it! An' the lives of you an' me an' all the sailormen demand it. Never think, like so many landlubbers do, that the sea's a feather-bed job, Tommy-boy. If you do, you'd better pack up an' get a job on a farm where you can lie on your back an' watch the corn grow." He lowered his voice. "But we'll be seeing Lundy Island light soon; then the smell o' the land will be in the air. I've got an itchy feeling in the soles of my feet, though, an' that usually means look out for squalls. An' I heard the second mate sayin' that he had a kind o' feeling that the wind would be shifting to the nor'-east. You know what that means? A head wind an' sea!"

Six bells struck. Over the shoulder, away to port, a blurred light appeared, then went out.

"Look! There's Lundy!" I cried excitedly.

Burns waited until it appeared again before he spoke.



"Yes, that's it. Every minute it flashes. We can't be very far from it. It's drawin' aft so quickly."

The light appeared, more dimly like the loom of one beneath the horizon.

"I believe it must be shutting in thick!" Hardly had the words left my lips when the dull boom of an explosive fog signal reverberated uncomfortably near.

"That's the fog gun," Burns explained, peering off to port. "It'll be gettin' thicker than pea soup unless the wind hauls round. We had it this way once before."

Boom! The sound came dully through the driving rain. It was closer to the beam now! The shrill summons of Mr. Boxlèy's whistle cut the darkness with the keenness of a knife.

"Answer it, Tommy-boy!" Burns ordered.

"Right-o!"

Hastening around to leeward of the deckhouse, I ran up the ladder to the bridge. Mr. Boxley was standing near the wheelhouse door, impatiently swinging his whistle around on a finger.

"Tell Burns to get a man out an' stand by the lead!" he barked. "Then get aft an' read the log. Hop to it!"

Sliding down the handrails of the bridge ladder, I raced back to Burns and passed on the order; then, running along the bridge deck, I braced myself for a moment against the wind, reached the after well deck, and fought my way through the surging water in the poop. There I halted! The waves, leaping precipitously astern, came out of the murkiness with a terrifying roar and I thought that they would break and engulf me where I stood. But I struggled on, the clatter of the steering chains in their leads adding their menace to that of the waves, and, opening the shutter of the bull's-eye lantern, read the log which was fastened to the taffrail on the lee side.

Back on the bridge I reported: "Twenty-five point four on the log, sir!"

"Good!" acknowledged Mr. Boxley, and added: "Get over on the lee side of the bridge an' keep a lookout!"

Rain, driving rain, came on the breath of the storm. The howling wind dogs snapped on the quarter. The

vessel lurched and twisted, shipping seas over the bulwarks on either side until the forward well was alive with dangerous water. The gale was increasing in violence, the mist banking up against the land. It seemed that we were in a ghostly world of our own.

How long I stood, clutching the rail and peering ahead, I do not know. I started nervously as a quiet voice behind me said :

"It's no a verra nice night to be going home, laddie. Keep your eyes wide open. Ye might see a fisherman or a wee boat that's havin' a worse time than ourselves."

"It's getting worse, sir," I cried.

"It is that, laddie. But we ha'e tae keep on. Business doesna tak this int' conseederation. Ye . . ."

*"By the mark fifteen !"*

Burns's voice, from the chains, came uncannily through the darkness.

Captain McFarlane went on : "Ye see, laddie, they ken nothing aboot winds an' tides. They're treacherous things on a night like this."

*"Deep eleven !"*

Mr. Slater, who had come on the bridge, came over and repeated the depth of water to the captain.

"Thanks, Mister. Ye'd better put her on 'stand by' !"

The third mate moved away. The engine-room telegraph rasped and the answering clang came up from the bowels of the vessel.

*"And a half eight, sir !"*

Mr. Boxley shouted above the howling of the wind, "The water's shoaling fast, sir !"

"Starboard a point, Mister !" shouted back Captain McFarlane, a note of uneasiness in his voice.

"Starboard a point it is, sir !" Mr. Boxley repeated.

Captain McFarlane said gently : "Dinna get nervous, laddie. She should be well clear o' the land." In a stentorian voice he ordered : "Keep a sharp lookout for Bull Point Light !"

*"Deep eight, sir !"*

How calm and confident the tone ! I wondered if Burns really knew how close the land lay. I could see

him in the chains, black against the white of the growling foam.

"*By the mark seven, sir!*"

Burns's voice was still calm and serene.

"Put her on slow!"

Under her eased-down engines the *Monarch* rode without life, but the wind, increasing, carried a wraith of spindrift over her, making it more difficult to see. The tide, I thought, running with the speed of a mill race, must be carrying her in towards the land. Yet the course had been altered, increasing the angle of safety.

Mr. Boxley came over on to the wing beside me and, leaning over the weather cloth, bellowed:

"What water have you now?"

Burns raised an arm to signify that he had heard. The lead swung through the air. He released the line. The lead flew forward, struck the water with a splash. But . . .

"*Light fine on the starboard bow! Breakers right ahead, sir!*"

"Full astern!" bellowed Captain McFarlane.

The second mate flung the indicator of the engine-room telegraph over with a bang. It was answered immediately from below. High up over the bow a white light had flashed three times and then had gone out. Above where it had been a steady red light came nearer and nearer.

I stood petrified, my heart in my mouth. The seconds seemed hours. I felt the engines stop, then go astern. Would she clear the shoals? The white light appeared again; it seemed almost on top of the foremast; the red light grew brighter; then, with a sickening shudder, the *Monarch* pooped a sea as she commenced to go astern.

The line of breakers became a part of the night. The white light appeared again, fainter now. The red light was but a feeble glimmer on the blanket of mist.

Captain McFarlane had never moved from the centre of the bridge. I could see him there, standing erect, as though turned to stone. I thought of his responsibility to his owners, to his crew, and I wondered, if I were in his place, what I would do. It would be so easy to stand off the land until the weather had fined away. It seemed



the prudent course, yet would not duty and pride urge me to proceed, even in the face of what seemed insuperable dangers? I did not have long to think. Mr. Boxley swung over beside me and shouted:

"Get aft and lend the third mate a hand to haul in the log before it gets foul of the propeller."

The darkness flung around me like a cloak as I sped from the bridge to where Mr. Slater stood waiting at the top of the ladder leading down to the after well.

"I . . . I don't think we can make it!" he declared nervously. "There's too much water!"

Seas had piled green over the poop until the after well deck was filled to the level of the hatches with a turmoil of water that growled through the winches as the *Monarch* rolled. The life lines, stretched fore and aft, were taut as iron bars but out of sight most of the time. The passage did seem impossible.

"We could try the hatches," I suggested, putting on a bold front.

"Yes, we could try that," Mr. Slater admitted, a little reluctantly. Although not over twenty years of age, he always seemed afraid of dirty weather.

We waited, tightening the lashings around our oilskins. The vessel quivered to an even keel, held by the wind which was drawing out abeam. Without a word we vaulted over the rails and dropped on top of the forward hatch, where we stood, close together, casting our eyes around to take the measure of the sea. The moment seemed opportune.

"Let's go!" Mr. Slater cried.

He raced along the hatch, leaped into the water swishing through the winches and found a lee behind the mainmast. I was at his heels, water up to my waist. Another glance around and we were out of the lee and on the after hatch. Half-way across we halted, petrified. A wall of water leaped over the quarter. It was impossible to go on; impossible to go back. Through my head ran the advice which Burns had once given me: "If you're ever in danger of bein' caught by a sea, Tommy-boy, get hold of something an' hang on. The sea will pass over you."



Never run away!" I looked around apprehensively. There was nothing to which to cling. Mr. Slater yelled something that was smothered by the screeching of the wind, as he staggered across the hatch. The sea broke, came on with a roar. Falling flat on my stomach, I tried to dig my nails into the tarpaulin that covered the hatch, but the canvas was sodden hard, smooth as glass!

In a swirl of maddened water I flung through the darkness, rolling over and over helplessly, like a log in the freshet. Time flew with lightning swiftness and I thought that I was over the rail and into the sea to leeward. I opened my lips to shout for help, only to be choked. With a crash that knocked the breath from my lungs, I struck the bulwarks and sank into the scuppers where, grasping a stanchion, I lay unnervingly buoyant. With an effort I rose up to clear my head of the smothering water. The poop ladder was near. I fought my way towards it and struggled to the top. Mr. Slater was there, stretched flat on the deck.

"W—w—we've got to get the l—log in!" I panted, tearing off my sou'wester and throwing it away on the wind.

He answered me with a groan. I crawled over beside him.

"Are you hurt?" I yelled.

He groaned again and waved me away. He made no attempt to get up. I peered at him for a second; then looked aft along the poop, which was glistening with tiny drops of phosphorescence. The wind was full upon the beam, howling at the height of a squall. The engines were stopped and the vessel lay wallowing in the trough.

Taking off my oilskins I jammed them into a ventilator so that they would not be blown away. I felt freer to move and I could be no wetter than I was.

Mr. Slater wriggled along the poop, groaning as though in great pain, and commenced the descent of the ladder. I wanted to help him but Mr. Boxley's orders were ringing in my ears. Perhaps the safety of the vessel depended on the log being taken in! What was the agony of one man

in comparison to the salvation of us all? Sympathy fought with duty. Duty won.

Mr. Slater gained the lee of the poop. Clinging to whatever my hands could grasp, I fought my way aft and reached the log. The line had fouled and broken. I cut it clear, made the clock fast to the rail so that it could not be washed away, and was about to retrace my steps when a roller, towering above its fellows, crashed upon the poop. The vessel gave a sickening shudder as if breaking asunder. The gear—bitts, hatch, and leads—protruded through a welter of foam. Flinging my arms around the kedge-anchor davit, I shut my eyes and held on. Sharply above the rush of the sea came the resounding crack of breaking iron. I clambered up the davit as the onrushing wave enveloped me. It passed on. A calamitous banging close beneath my feet drew my gaze to the spot. A chain flew through the air like a flail!

The horror of this accident—about the possibility of which I had often heard—struck me so forcibly that, for a moment, I was incapable of action. It seemed that now disaster was inevitable. In an hour or less the vessel must be driven on to the rocks and there pounded to pieces by the assault of the waves.

In a moment of sanity it occurred to me that because the vessel was stopped, they might not know upon the bridge. Fear, and a hope that possibly something could be done to stave off disaster, lent speed to my limbs. I flew along the poop, leaped down the ladder into the water on the well, fought my way forward, and, gaining the comparative safety of the bridge deck, raced upon the bridge.

"The captain! Where's the captain?" I screamed, panting for breath.

"What's the matter, laddie?"

The calm voice steadied me. I groped towards it.

"T—the port steering chain has carried away, sir, and the quadrant is banging about!" I shouted.

"Ma conscience!" Captain McFarlane exclaimed.

He took a turn across the bridge. Clinging to the rail, I counted his steps . . . quick, agitated steps. He halted

by the wheelhouse window. The light from the binnacle touched his face with bejewelled softness.

He shouted : "Mr. Boxley ! Are ye there ?"

Mr. Boxley moved over beside him.

Captain McFarlane ordered : "Get all hands out. The engineers as well ! The port steering chain has carried away. Get the quadrant lashed before the rudder carries away ; then bend on the spare chain. Be as quick as ye can before the win' shifts. I'll keep her lying here !"

"Aye ! Aye, sir !" sang out Mr. Boxley. He swung around on me, and bellowed : "What are you standin' there like a stookey for ? Are you deaf ? Are you dumb ? Get all hands on deck in the wink of an eye or, by the Lord Harry, I'll give you something to wake you up !"

I ran from the bridge, shouting : "All hands on deck ! All hands on deck !"

## CHAPTER XII

### DISABLED ON A LEE SHORE

IN a lull which wrapped the night in a thick blanket of swirling fog, the sailormen trooped aft along the decks to the poop, each carrying a lighted hurricane lantern which bobbed and swung as the vessel lurched. Behind them Mr. Boxley came bustling, heralded by a string of blasphemous oaths and the sweeping beam of an electric torch which cut a pathway through the mist like a ghostly finger. Fearlessly pushing his way aft through the water and clambering up the ladder to the poop with many a snort and grunt, he halted by the hatch to survey the damage. The sailormen stood around like gilded statues in the flickering light.

With an oath that startled everyone with its ferocity, Mr. Boxley swung around and bellowed: "Boy!"

"Sir!" I answered, stepping forward.

"Get on to the bridge as quickly as your legs will carry you," he ordered, "and tell the captain that both chains have carried away. It will take hours to repair them. I'm carryin' on!"

"Aye! Aye, sir!"

I conveyed the information to the bridge. Captain McFarlane listened attentively, nodding his head with perplexity. When I had finished, he reached forward and, laying a hand on the roping of the weather cloth, held it down while he cast his eyes around. Rain and fog swirled about him. Water streamed from his sou'wester to his beard. Deep in his thoughts, he seemed oblivious to it all.

After what seemed hours he said: "Go aft, laddie, an' tell Mr. Boxley to secure the quadrant and when that is done, rig a sea anchor. We'll need it to hold us frae the coast should the win' shift. We can tell him tae be as quick as he can."

I ran along the deck, wet to the skin and chilled to the



bone, but stimulated by an invigorating exaltation. All the adventures of which I had dreamed were crowding upon me and my cup of happiness was full and brimming over.

When I reached the poop, the wind had died away but a piercing note, high up in the sky, proclaimed that the storm was gathering force to come from another point. The sailormen had taken the mooring wires from their reels and, under Mr. Boxley's watchful gaze, were endeavouring to secure the quadrant to the bitts. It was ticklish work, for when a sea hit the rudder, the wires made fast to the quadrant would twang under the terrific strain, and twice, as I watched, they snapped and flung through the air with lightning swiftness, and only the dexterity of the sailormen saved them from broken limbs. At such a moment Mr. Boxley's temper got the better of him. He cursed the quadrant; he cursed the sailormen for being a bunch of "useless articles, fit only to drink in a dock-side pub"; and shaking his great fists, he cursed the urge that had taken him to sea. But, between times, he slaved with his men, doing more than his share, and when the quadrant was secured, he led them to his cabin door where from a demijohn he gave them each a "drop o' grog" before taking them on to the forward well to rig the sea anchor.

Two small derricks were taken from their lashings on the bridge deck and carried to Number One hatch, where they were lashed crosswise. Spare awnings and tarpaulins were made fast to a ridge rope which had been bent to the extremities of the derricks. To the lower part of the spar framework a small kedge anchor was fastened and to a chain bridle which extended from the four arms of the cross a hauling line was hitched.

For hours the work had progressed in silence. Now as the dawn came into the sky and the contraption was hoisted on a derrick ready to be lowered into the sea, a voice came hoarsely from the direction of the bridge:

"Be as quick as ye can, Mister. The win' is comin' away!"

The sharp line of a squall darkened the dawn to the

northward. A gust rippled the greasy surface of the heavy swell; another followed close on its heels and the wind settled into a snorting gale from the northwest. The rain beat down with blinding violence.

Mr. Boxley, his face reddened and puffed with the cold, loomed up before me.

"Get up on the bridge an' report 'all ready'!" he shouted.

Burns was in the chains as I raced along the deck. He had been there all night, taking a cast of the lead every fifteen minutes.

"Where away, Tommy-boy?" he asked.

I told him.

"You might tell the Old Man—confidentially, I mean—that I love him just as much as ever," he shouted, "but that my love will tur-n to hate if he does not send me a bouquet in the guise of a cup of tea. My innards are weak, an' the skin has deserted my fingers, an' the salt water is seepin' in an' chasin' the blood from my veins. Tell him that, Tommy-boy!"

"I shall!" I shouted back, never pausing in my stride. A cup of tea! Gosh! The waters of anticipation flooded my mouth so that when I reached the bridge, the words of Mr. Boxley fumbled on my tongue. Somehow or other I forced them out; then, a little shamefaced, I stood to one side as Captain McFarlane picked up a megaphone and shouted down the forward well:

"Put the sea anchor over, Mister!"

The *Monarch* was staggering and drifting with the wind full upon the beam but a clearance had come in the rain. Mr. Boxley sang out, "Aye! Aye, sir!" A sailorman leaned over the bulwark rail, drew a knife from the sheath on his belt, and cut the stop which held the sea anchor to the derrick fall. It took the water with a splash, dragged to windward across the bow as the vessel drifted down to leeward. The hauling line surged on the fore-castle-head bitts . . . tautened . . . slapped the water . . . tautened again . . . held! Slowly the vessel came head to the wind and sea. Suspense showed in deep lines on Captain McFarlane's weary face. He gazed across the

forecastle head to where the sea anchor dragged in a smother of foam. . . . A faint sigh of relief passed from his lips as the sea anchor proved to be staunch and good.

"Go an' tell the mate, laddie, tae let the men ha'e a cup o' tea before they go aft tae the steering chains. It'll warm them up."

"Yes, sir. Will I send the steward up to you, sir?" I asked.

"Aye! Ye might."

Into the saloon entrance I shouted: "The Old Man wants you, Steward!" and sliding down the handrails of the ladder to the well deck, I skipped to where Burns stood in the chains, his fingers gnarled and stiff, his eyes dull and bloodshot, and yelled: "Tea-o! For sailors! I told the Old Man what you said and he ordered, 'Tea-o! for sailors!'"

Burns hitched the lead line to the rail and dropped to the deck, where he stood swinging his arms across his chest while he asked anxiously:

"You didn't tell him what I said, Tommy-boy?"

"I did! And he told me to give you his love!"

"Holy mackerel! What kind of a sailor will he think I am?"

"A flying-fish sailor! Of no use except in fine weather!"

"You cheeky little devil!"

He aimed the toe of his sea boot at me but, dodging to one side, I laughed into his face and sped along the deck to bump into Mr. Boxley, who was walking aft.

"What's this? What's this?" he bellowed. "A picnic?"

"No! No! Sir! Tea-o! For sailors!"

"WHAT!!!"

His anger brought me up with a round turn. I shifted from one foot to the other and backed away as he advanced, his gorilla-like arms held out before him.

"T—the captain said to let the men have some t—tea, sir!" I cried.

"Tea!" he barked. "Tea when there's work to be done! What does he think this is? A tea party? Holy jumpin' Joseph! I'll give them tea!" He swung on the sailormen who were standing around, blowing into their hands. He



thundered : "All hands ! Lay aft on the poop !" He spat on the deck. "At the double now. Sink your souls ! I'll give you tea !"

The sailormen glowered their anger at me as they passed before him. Burns half-closed his eyes and nodded his head slowly, implying that I was all kinds of a fool. I nursed my chagrin as I followed Mr. Boxley along the deck. On the poop Mr. Boxley eyed me up and down and said :

"Get up on the bridge and stand by for orders. You've been more than a nuisance around here already !"

With my childish impetuosity I had twisted a kink in his nature. He had been, I believe, on the point of sending the men for tea. Now, because of my action, they would get none. Neither would he. They would all suffer cold and hunger until the steering chains were repaired and the malice had worked out of his system. Feeling very much to blame, I slunk forward to the bridge like a whipped cur.

When I crept into the lee wing of the bridge, the captain seemed oblivious of my presence, oblivious of the cold spray which the flanged bow sent high into the air to fling down the wind about him. He stood in front of the wheelhouse, swaying on his feet as the *Monarch*, labouring and straining, buried her nose in mountainous, onrushing seas, and gazed aft to where the land, growing bolder every minute as the murkiness cleared away, stood out against the sky. He was gauging the distance, I knew, and calculating the time that it would take for his vessel to reach the rocks. After a while his head sank on to his chest and he walked towards me. With something of a shock, I perceived that the ruddiness had left his face, leaving it grey and etched with innumerable well-defined lines. But when he spoke from out of his beard, his voice was full and calm.

"Ye're gettin' experiences, laddie, that'll mak' a man out o' ye. D'ye like it ?"

"I do, sir."

His eyes searched my face before he went on : "I mind when I was your age I liked it too. It was gran' fun tae be swingin' on a yard while the mast swayed dizzily tae



the motion o' the vessel. I've been thinkin' aboot it, standin' here looking at the shore, which is ower near for comfort, an' wonderin' if it's a' worth it. The worry an' the hardships, I mean. I believe it is. There's something aboot it that sinks intae your soul an' mak's ye run an' shiver wi' life. Ye feel ye canna be content withoot it. Whiles I think I would be content on the land, sittin' back easy in a big chair, but then I think aboot the gales an a shiver runs frae ma toes tae ma hair an' I ken I would be lost withoot it. There's something, laddie, something. . . . The auld sailormen say it's God's fingers strokin' the back o' those He wants tae man His ships. Mebbe it is . . . mebbe it is. For masel', I'm inclined tae the notion that it's just plain stupidity on oor part. We should leave the sea before the shivers begin tae tickle us wi' their icy fingers. But we canna, an' that's the rub!"

He gazed aft to see how the work was progressing on the poop, and, after lifting his eyes to the land, looked again at me, and said with surprise: "Ye must be awfu' cold, laddie. Ye're most naked! Did ye ha'e a wee cup o' tea?"

"No, sir. I didn't have time, sir."

"Ye'd better nip awa' doon an' get some. At the same time dress up a bit. The rain's lifted. Dinna wast' time, for the third mate's broken a leg an' I might need ye."

After changing into dry clothing and washing down some hard-tack with copious draughts of scalding tea, I relieved Burns in the chains. Luckily I didn't have to take a cast, for it was all I could do to hang on the slippery platform as the vessel pitched, sending a fillip of spray down on the wind. When he returned, he whispered that the water was shoaling again and it looked to him, if Mr. Boxley and his gang didn't get a move on, that the vessel would pile up on the rocks to the southward of the Bull. With a nod of his head he indicated the line of breakers which stood out white against the blackness of the cliffs. At dawn two black balls, the "not under command" signal, had been hoisted on the jumper stay to warn all vessels proceeding in the vicinity to keep out of our way. He looked up toward them and said:

"D'you know, Tommy-boy, that's the third time I've seen them flyin'. There should be good luck in it but you never can tell. If you know any prayers, you'd better be saying them. An' while you're at it, you might as well say some for me. I never did know any an' sometimes I wish I did. They tell me that they're as good as an oil-skin coat on a day like this." He pulled himself into the chains and continued in an undertone: "The Old Man is looking over the weather cloth. You'd better forget the prayers an' get up on the bridge."

Captain McFarlane was gazing to the north and east with the binoculars glued to his eyes when I reached his side. He turned to me and asked: "What do ye make out of that, laddie?"

Over the starboard bow, three miles or more away, a small vessel was approaching, head on to us, and rolling to her beam ends as she rose up on the crests of the rollers.

"It . . . it looks like a tug, sir," I cried, unable to control the excitement which bubbled within me.

Anger blazed into Captain McFarlane's tired eyes. "Damn!" he muttered fiercely, and as the tug, belching smoke from its red funnel, came nearer and nearer, hot on the trail of salvage, he stamped up and down the bridge, gazing aft toward the poop every time that he cleared the wheelhouse. "Get aft there, boy, an' see how long they're goin' tae be!" he snapped in a voice that made me jump.

In answer to my query, Mr. Boxley bellowed: "An hour!" and waved me impatiently away. I ran back to the bridge.

The tug now had slowed down and was circling the *Monarch* while her skipper, muffled up to the ears in a greatcoat, surveyed the condition of his prey. Finally she stopped on the weather side and a penetrating hail came through a megaphone.

"Take you in for a thousand pounds, Captain. They telephoned up from Bull Point that you was in distress."

Impatiently Captain McFarlane continued to pace up and down, paying no heed to the offer. The tug rolled

nearer and the skipper walked out on to the wing of the bridge with a megaphone in his hand. He put it to his mouth.

"A thousand to Cardiff an' cheap at the price. The wind is gettin' a foot against the land. It'll be blowin' heaven's-hard before many hours are past! The storm signals are up on the Custom House. You'll never make port on your own!"

"The weather's finin' away!" bellowed Captain McFarlane, shaking his fist. "Get out o' ma way or I'll be on top o' ye, ye pirate!"

"Right-o, Captain, I'll bargain with you later. I'll hang around until the rocks are scrapin' your bottom. Signal when you want me, but don't hesitate too long! The price'll be fifteen hundred pounds when I come back!"

With a jeering toot from its siren, the tug got under way, spray flying from under its stern, and took up a position about a mile to leeward.

The sun rose higher and the boisterous morning became a tempestuous afternoon as the crew toiled incessantly on the poop. One at a time the sailormen slipped forward to the galley for a bite to eat, but never a one loitered by the way. It was work, arduous, thankless work, with the result showing only by degrees. Once the chains were connected by wire, only to be broken as soon as the "preventers" were taken from the quadrant and the weight of the beam sea fell upon the rudder. If the hand steering gear had only survived the assault of the broken chains, it would have been easy to make port. Captain McFarlane told me this with a sad shake of his head. On two previous occasions he had done so.

"But ye see, laddie, we canna ha'e things as we would like them," he concluded, gazing away over the quarter to where Bull Point stood out in all its dangerous ugliness. "Mebbe the tide'll be kind an' keep us frae the rocks until Mr. Boxley is ready."

But as the afternoon dragged along, the *Monarch* sagged closer to the shore. The tug got under way again and slowly approached.

"What about it now, Captain? You'll be on the Bull





"TAKE YER PUFFIN' BARGE HOME. I DON'T WANT IT!"





before you know it. I'll make it a bargain at fifteen hundred pounds," hailed a voice.

Vacillation settled on Captain McFarlane's face in thin, dark lines. He heaved the greatcoat up on his shoulders and buried his beard upon his chest until, weighed down with worry, he shrank in stature. He raised his eyes when the second mate, who had been standing by under the forecastle head to attend the sea anchor, came on the bridge and approached him.

"Were ye hearin' him, sir?" the second mate asked, and when Captain McFarlane did not answer, he went on: "It might be as well t' take him."

The frown deepened on Captain McFarlane's brow. He barked in exasperation: "Ye get forrard where ye belong, Mister!"

"But, sir . . ." the second mate began grumblingly.

"Get forrard!" bellowed Captain McFarlane and he hurried the second mate down the ladder by walking towards him. "An' ye, ye dock rat," he continued, turning in the direction of the tug, "tak' yer puffin' barge home. I don't want it!"

A laugh mocked him across the water. He paid no heed but came towards me and said: "Temptation, laddie, is aye at hand. It would be sae easy tae nod the head. But fifteen hundred pounds is a lot o' money. An' there's aye a chance. Tak' a wee walk aft an' see how the mate's gettin' on. Dinna ask him onything. He's working hard."

It struck me as I walked along the deck that I would never attain the fortitude of command or the power of will to hold on to a hope in the face of disaster, and yet there was something magnificent in the attitude of Captain McFarlane. He was fighting, in the turmoil of his thoughts, for his reputation and to save his employers fifteen hundred pounds. I realized, too, when I reached the poop, that Mr. Boxley and the sailormen were fighting on his side and that they were willing to abide by his decision. Strange emotions swept over me and I swallowed a lump that came into my throat. Duty, in that moment, became a virtue. I wanted to be a captain, to stand upon the bridge weighed down with responsibility.

Mr. Boxley saw me and cried : "We're about ready, boy ! Get up on the bridge an' stand by for a signal !"

I stood for a moment amazed at the jubilation in his voice ; then, in the deepening twilight, I returned to the bridge.

"They won't be long, sir," I reported.

Captain McFarlane nodded and turned away.

The flashes of Bull Point Light seemed appallingly near. The dull line of the land stood out against the dimly lit sky of late twilight. The sound of the waves breaking on the rocks came faintly through the gloom. The lights of the tug bobbed up and down and drew nearer. Captain McFarlane ordered the second mate to stand by the anchors. Tramer came to the wheel. Burns sang out : "*By the mark seven, sir !*" My heart throbbed with a wild excitement. Above the anxious sounds came the mocking voice through the megaphone.

"You'd better take a tow, Captain ! Won't be able to get a hold of you soon. Call it a bargain at five thousand pounds and cheap at the price. Pass a line, Captain !"

Captain McFarlane swung across the bridge and, with quick nervous steps, swung back again. He looked aft towards the poop. It seemed as if the waves were breaking almost under the quarter. He picked up the megaphone which lay beside the engine-room telegraph and, dejectedly, walked out on the wing of the bridge nearest the tug. Anguish stabbed me like a knife as I watched him put the megaphone to his mouth. Tortured by his thoughts, he was about to capitulate before the vessel would be wrecked upon the rocks. His reputation would be lost, but the lives of his sailormen would be saved. I saw him as an old, old man broken on the wheel of responsibility.

He shouted : "All right ! Take a . . ."

I ran towards him, crying : "Sir ! Sir !"

He swung towards me. The megaphone dropped to his side. "What's that, laddie ?" he demanded eagerly.

I had no answer. I didn't know why I had called out as I did. I stood before him, stammering like a fool. The light of expectancy faded from his eyes and he turned away, raising the megaphone to his mouth. In a fever of

consternation I looked aft towards the poop. Mr. Boxley was flashing a torch. Full against the wind came his drawing cry :

“All ready aft, sir !”

Captain McFarlane laughed. “Take a—” he reiterated to the tugboat skipper, “—round turn out o’ yersel’ an’ go tae the Devil. Stand by forrard to heave the sea anchor on board,” he bellowed to the second mate on the fore-castle head. “Ring them stand by doon below, laddie !” I rang the engine-room telegraph. The order was answered immediately from below. “Heave away forrard,” came the next order. The windlass hissed steam as the strain of the sea anchor came upon the drum. “Dead slow ahead, laddie !” The *Monarch* vibrated to life. “Steady as she goes !” Tramer answered from the wheelhouse and I heard the steering-rods grunt in their leads as he moved the wheel to keep the vessel on her course.

Mr. Boxley came bustling on to the bridge, breathing with the snort of an angry bull. His clothes were ragged and covered with grease. Congealed blood covered a wound on his cheek. Only his deep-sea cap, which was pulled at a vicious angle over his right eye, proclaimed his rank.

“You’ll have to go easy on that gear aft, sir,” he shouted gruffly, planting his feet on the deck before Captain McFarlane as if they were trees. “It’s only a makeshift job but with care it should hold until we get in !”

“An’ thanks to ye, Mister,” acknowledged Captain McFarlane, and after a slight pause he went on : “Ye’d better tak’ the men awa’ doon tae the steward. They’ll be a wee bit tired an’ thirsty.”

Mr. Boxley grunted and turned truculently to me. “What are you gawkin’ at, boy ?” he bellowed. “Didn’t you hear what the captain said ? All hands splice the main brace !”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then step lively or, by the Lord Harry, I’ll encourage you with the toe of my boot. It’s not every day that all hands splice the main brace ! All hands muster below !”

“All hands muster below, sir,” I repeated and ran away to convey the news.



## CHAPTER XIII

### A SAILOR'S FAREWELL

BURNS stood at the door of the half deck. In mufti he didn't look quite the same. Perhaps it was the soft hat which sat so squarely on his brow like that of a lawyer's clerk. Perhaps it was the blue suit, so trim and neat. The brass buttons had been replaced by shiny black ones which reflected the gold of the sun with a harsh brilliance. Or perhaps it was the mist through which I couldn't see distinctly . . . a mist that choked me.

"Fare thee well, Tommy-boy !" he shouted and, stepping over the sill, he sang :

"So fare thee well, my Tommy-boy,  
An' fare thee well a-whi-ile !  
B-ut I'll come back again some day  
An' greet thee with a smile !"

I envied him his cheerfulness. If only my apprenticeship had been completed, I could have gone with him. Perhaps after passing our examination and after "wetting" our certificates, we could find a vessel on which to ship together. Perhaps . . . but my dreams were but soap bubbles, drifting away to break into nothingness. Burns was before me and he was leaving. That was reality. Ever since the *Monarch* had reached Cardiff with the salt from the spray glistening on her rusty hull, I had dreaded this moment, and now it had come, I didn't know what to say.

"Come on, Tommy-boy," he shouted, slapping me on the shoulder so that I stood up and faced him. "Let it be a sailor's farewell. Good-bye an' t' hell with you ! Remember there's hair on your chest now an' the smell o' tar on your clothes." He squeezed my hand until I gritted my teeth to keep from wincing. He went on : "Some day we shall be shipmates again. You'll be Captain Tommy-

boy, the hoary-headed old martinet, an' I'll be Mr. Whiskey-whiskers, the drunken third mate, who'll save your vessel from being wrecked on the Sea of Tin-tacks when she's loaded with 'black diamonds', the jewels o' Wales. Think of it, Tommy-boy, an' if you have tears, keep them for that time !"

"Oh ! Shut up !" I cried.

"Wouldst thou send me forth in wrath ?" he demanded to know, his eyebrows raised quizzically.

"No . . . but . . ."

He placed an arm around my shoulders. We walked out on to the deck.

"I'll let you know how I get along," he told me, "an' you might write to me. Not that I'll worry about you. The deck's firm under your feet an' there's a purpose in your face." He squeezed my hand. "Good-bye, Tommy-boy. Keep the old flag flyin'. Good-bye !"

"Good-bye, Bruce, and the best of luck !" I heard myself say.

For a few seconds we looked deeply into each other's eyes and then he was swinging down the gangway towards the cab which had his gear piled on top. Once, before the coal tips came between us, he turned and looked back.

"Good-bye, Tommy-boy !" he shouted again and he waved his hand.

I didn't answer for a minute. Before my eyes floated a vision. He was sitting in the stern sheets of a lifeboat which was suspended from its davits over a turbulent sea. He was a sailor, every inch of him. I caught the glance which bade me join him. I sought it again. If it was there, distance, like a hungry wolf, devoured it. And then I thought : "He isn't a sailor any more. He's a land-lubber in a soft hat ! I'm the sailor with the deck firm under my feet. He couldn't ask me to join him !"

I ran to the rail.

"So long, you sailor !" I shouted. "Go and let the land sharks gobble you up. So lo-ong !"

But when I re-entered the half deck, I wasn't so sure of myself. The memories of our association played havoc with my thoughts.



PART TWO



THE SECOND VOYAGE





## CHAPTER I

### A CANTANKEROUS ENGINEER

SOON after the arrival of the *Monarch* at Cardiff, Captain McFarlane returned from a visit to the agent's office and told Mr. Boxley that the charter, for which the vessel had been driven into port, had been cancelled and that there was not another one in sight. No reflection was cast upon him, but he felt, as did all of us, that the chances he had taken on the homeward passage were unjustified. When the cargo of grain was discharged, the *Monarch* was ordered to Glasgow, where in the Gareloch on the Firth of Clyde she was laid up, swinging to her anchor, until a favourable charter could be procured.

The summer came and went. Each day, from six to six, Hall, Tramer, and I, under the ever-critical eye of Mr. Boxley, chipped and painted on the hull and super-structure in a futile effort to combat the corrosion which attacked the vessel from all sides. We learned that a mate's work is never done and that a cold ship deteriorates as quickly as an uninhabited house.

The vessel was a prison. The sailormen had been paid off. We apprentices were not allowed on shore and the only contact we had with the land was the boatman who came off each morning with fresh vegetables and meat. We planned to go on shore with him, but we never did. There was so much to do on board and time flew ahead of us with the swiftness of a frightened gull. Mr. Boxley, I believe, sensed our mood, for in the long twilights he gathered us around him on the cross-bunker hatch and told us yarns of his early days at sea. Often, when the others had gone to their bunks, I would stand by the bulwark rail feasting my eyes on the purple of the hills which seemed to roll back upon each other until they reached the heart of Scotland. I would stamp up and down the deck, glowering at the steel-grey water and chafing at the discipline which held me where I was. But

reason always returned. When the land was lost in the black darkness of the Gareloch and only a few stars stood sentinel over the night, I would enter the half deck to fall asleep amid dreams of a command.

Then one day, so bleak that the hills were shut in and the foreshore crept out of the sea like a half-drowned dog, Captain McFarlane, who had been on holiday, arrived alongside in a tugboat with a crew.

"We're guan tae sea, laddies," he shouted up into our eager faces lining the bulwark rail. "It's a gran' day! It's a gran' day!"

We whooped with delight. We dropped the pilot ladder over and gave the sailormen a hand to haul their gear on board. We were going to sea!

Rain swept across the Clyde from the north as the *Monarch* was towed to Glasgow for overhauling. Through the mist the stocks in the shipyards seemed to frown on her like witches of ill omen. The wind, whipping across the tide, sent the muddy water growling against her hull as though to retard her progress, and near Erskine Ferry a tow-rope parted and only the alertness of the pilot saved her from grounding on the southern bank. Then at the very hour the charter was closed, she was neaped in the dry-dock, which caused such a furore among the shore officials that, for a time, it appeared as though we had deliberately interfered with the phases of the moon, so much blame was heaped upon our heads. To further worry Captain McFarlane, on the day she floated at the top of a spring tide, the local delegates of the Seamen's Union came on board and ordered him to discharge all the Chinese firemen. Henceforth, they asserted, it was British seamen for British ships! They waved aside Captain McFarlane's arguments and declared arrogantly that the vessel would not be allowed to move from her berth to proceed to sea until their demands were met. They had the upper hand. The Chinese firemen were discharged and runners—men who did odd jobs of sailorizing around the coast—were engaged for the voyage to Cardiff where a cargo of coal was to be loaded for Antofagasta, or a port north of Valparaiso.

In the Irish Sea the *Monarch*, flying light and with a skeleton crew, was driven close to the rocks off Bardsey Island by a southerly gale which sprang up in the night, and only by flooding the after hold was she saved from becoming a wreck. At Cardiff the runners were discharged, and while the cargo was being loaded a Welsh donkeyman was employed to maintain steam within the boilers.

Meanwhile Percy's apprenticeship was completed and he followed Burns ashore. Tramer became senior cadet and in the absence of the third mate, who had been sent into hospital, was acting in that capacity. Two first voyagers joined. One, Peter Wainwright, soon gained the nickname of Spifkins because his brains seemed to lie in his feet, which were so large he was frequently tripping over them. The other, Ernie Wier, was a little bit of a chap with the impudence and mischievousness of a monkey. Mr. Boxley ordered me to take them in hand and "knock the stuffin' out o' them an' sense into them" as quickly as possible, for, as was customary in the home parts, the *Monarch* was still without sailormen.

But sailormen are not made in a day and I very soon discovered that it was much easier to do the work myself than to make them do it. They were both akin to the "Artful Dodger", and the "Liverpool Man", that mythical individual on whom everything is blamed, was an innocent child compared to them. They were without guile, however, and if they did try my patience, it was with a laugh lurking in their eyes, and I felt sure that when the *Monarch* put to sea, they would shape up well.

The first day of November came in with the clammy touch of winter. The sun, veiled in a mist that sheeted the whole sky, at times broke through the scud to send warm rays through the half deck door to where I sat on the edge of a partly opened drawer, sewing buttons on my greatcoat with a large darning needle. Time and again, as I pricked my fingers, I wished that the *Monarch* had not lain in port so long, making necessary the job on which I was busy. It was a botheration and I longed for the balmy days of the tropics when the greatcoat would be stowed away in the bottom of a locker.



I was forlorn too. Burns had not written as he had promised nor had I written to him. I missed him more and more as the days passed, for neither in Spifkins nor in Ernie could I find the companionship I desired, and I wondered to whom I would turn in the long nights at sea when the loneliness would close upon me, like a black squall covering the sky. Suddenly there broke in upon my reverie :

"Ho ! There ! You lubbers ! Shake a leg an' carry this dunnage on board !"

The familiar voice drew me to the half deck door with a rush. Under the coal tip on the quay stood Burns, with a chest and a sea bag lying at his feet. He wore a blue coat with a velvet collar and on his head, perched at a rakish angle, was a bowler hat. He waved and as quickly as my legs could carry me I was by his side.

"Hullo, Tommy-boy !" he shouted in greeting, shaking my hand vigorously, as though it was the handle of the pump outside the galley door.

"Hullo, Bruce !" I returned, my heart too full for further utterance.

"Mister to you, m'lad," said he, squaring his shoulders and taking a step backwards. "I'm a blinkin' brass-bound officer, I'll have you know . . . third mate of this 'ere packet . . . an' it's mister to you !"

Thinking that he had decided to stand within the dignity of his position, my heart sank down into my stomach, but into his eyes came the twinkle that I knew so well. However, stiffening to attention, I saluted him smartly and asked gravely :

"Yes, sir ! Your orders, sir ?"

"Stand on your head an' take a running jump out of yourself !" he shouted ; then he laughed uproariously and slapped me on the back. "It's glad I am to see you, Tommy-boy. I intended to drop you a line an' then I thought : 'Gosh ! I'll surprise the little bounder.' I wrote to the Old Man, extolling my virtues an' askin' for the job as third mate, hoping that it was still vacant. 'Report immediately,' he replied, an' here I am with the ink scarcely dry on my certificate."

"Was it easy to get . . . the certificate?" I asked.

"Not so very . . . but I managed to scrape through when the examiner was returnin' from lunch. He was so bloated with beer an' the gristle from a sheep's head that he couldn't see me dodgin' out under the summit of his stomach. It was as easy as that." He squared his shoulders and patted his chest with pride. "But, Tommy-boy, summon the rascallions from the half deck to carry this dunnage of mine on board an' we'll have a yarn."

"They've all gone to the dock gates to get something to eat," I told him, "and the Old Man and Mr. Boxley are at breakfast in the saloon."

"That's just my luck!" he shouted. "I wanted to come on board in style, followin' in the wake of my minions, an' now I must bend my back an' dirty my lily-white hands. How are the mighty fallen! Woe unto me, Tommy-boy, an' unto you. Pick up the sea bag an' I'll take the chest, an' like the Arabs we'll silently steal on board. Lead on, Macduff!"

"To victory or to death!" said I, shouldering the sea bag.

"To fiddlesticks!" said he, grunting as he picked up the chest.

After establishing himself in the third mate's cabin he went along to report his arrival to Captain McFarlane while I returned to the half deck to finish sewing the buttons to my coat, happier than I had been for many a day. Again the *Monarch* became a vehicle of romance, carrying me forward, under the guidance of Burns, to the goal of command which lay obscured by the mists of the future.

I was still sewing on the buttons when a belligerent voice hailed from the quay. Throwing my coat on to the settee, I hastened out on deck.

Under the coal tip stood a cab. From a window a head protruded and an arm beckoned to me with an impatient insistence.

"Here! You!" the mouth shouted.

I leaned on the bulwark rail, purposely ignoring the impolite summons and pretending to be interested in the coal that rumbled down the chute.

"You little snipe ! You dodderin' slow coach !" stormed the voice. "Can't ye hear me ?"

I glanced towards the cab, raising my brows inquiringly.

"Is this the *Monarch* ?" demanded the voice.

Looking directly towards the speaker, I invited him to read the name which was painted in large letters upon the bow.

Two grey-green eyes blazed wrathfully at me then slowly swung in the direction I had indicated. The man got out of the cab and immediately began haggling with the driver over the fare. I listened to the altercation with a great deal of amusement until the driver threatened to dump the luggage into the water. Strolling on to the quay I approached and said :

"The fare is not exorbitant. You'd better pay it."

The man who had been in the cab swung round on his heels and contemplated me savagely.

"Your tongue is ower souple an' wags at the wrong end," he snapped. "When James Anderson McNab wants your advice, he'll ask for it !"

But he must have perceived the futility of haggling, for he dug deeply into his trouser pocket and paid the cabby his fare, withholding, I concluded, the tip, for the cabby, a malicious grin on his beer-bloated face, dumped the sea bag from the dicky into a grimy puddle of glutinous mud and coal dust, and before Mr. McNab could recover from his surprise, he had whipped up the old horse and was off.

"Losh ! Did ye see him ?" blurted out Mr. McNab, shaking his fist in my face. "I'll ha'e the law on him, that I will. He's a low-down thievin' scoundrel !"

"You won't have time to do anything about it," I remarked. "We're sailing to-night, on the midnight tide."

Mr. McNab let his head fall to one side as he looked at me with an incredulous expression in his eyes.

"We'll no be sailin' as soon as that," he asserted.

"How can you prevent it ?" I asked, leading him on.

"I'm the third engineer," he retorted, "but haud your tongue an' carry this bag on board."



I declined the honour, suggesting that he might shut his mouth, thereby saving his wind so that he could carry it himself.

For a second I thought he was about to explode, so inflamed did his cheeks become, but, with an effort of will, he swallowed his wrath and demanded to know :

“Are there any stewards on board ?”

“None !”

“Weel ! Tell one o’ the firemen to carry the bag tae my cabin.”

“No firemen,” I said sententiously.

He eyed me suspiciously. A scowl settled on his brow and, reaching forward, he grasped my wrist with vice-like fingers and thrust his face close to mine.

“If you’re pullin’ my leg,” he barked out, “I’ll wring your bloomin’ neck. D’ye hear me, ye little wasp ?”

It was impossible not to hear him. I told him so, protesting that I spoke the truth.

He believed me with an irritating reluctance. “What kind of a ship’s this, anyway ?” he asked, releasing my wrist.

I explained to him about the Chinese and told him that there were rumours to the effect that the firemen were to come on board after the *Monarch* was out of the dock and at anchor in the Barry Roads, where there could be no molestation from the irate members of the Seamen’s Union.

After thinking over the information as if unable to comprehend it fully, he picked the sea bag from the puddle, gingerly placed it on his shoulder and, grunting savagely, started up the hatch which served as a gangway. Midway he slipped. The sea bag fell from his shoulder and dropped into the water between the vessel and the quay. He contemplated the catastrophe with a dumb anger, the words which rolled around on his tongue finding no utterance. Quickly I dropped the end of a guy rope over the side, slid down, bent on the bag, climbed to the deck again and pulled it up, hand over hand, after me.

Mr. McNab surveyed its sodden bulk with protruding, malevolent eyes. Oaths flew from his tongue. He strutted



up and down, his long, thin arms swinging his hairy fists into the air like destructive hammers.

"It's a' the doin's o' those heathen Chinks!" he cried. "But I'll sweat the guts out o' the yellow trash. Losh! They'll regret the day they ever met James Anderson McNab!"

The appearance of Mr. Boxley cut short his flow of vituperation. Picking up his sea bag, he followed me along the deck to his cabin.

"The Chinese didn't drop your sea bag into the water," I ventured, on the point of leaving him and in an effort to allay his wrath.

He shot me a baleful glare. He shook his fist. He shouted: "Ye mightna think so. But ye'll see they'll suffer! The yellow rats!"

I could not understand him. A premonition of evil clung to my thoughts as I sauntered along to the half deck and with a singular severity ordered Spifkins and Ernie to turn to.

## CHAPTER II

### A HAZARDOUS MISSION

WITH all her crew except the firemen signed on and on board, the *Monarch*, that evening at six, left the berth beneath the coal tips and was towed down to the pierheads in readiness to put to sea through the lock gates when the tide was at the full. A gust of rain drifted in from the Bristol Channel on a boisterous wind to dampen the coal dust which covered the vessel in a soft, black coat and to fall upon our hot cheeks with a refreshing touch. As usual, Mr. Boxley was buzzing about like a fly in a gale of wind, predicting that dirty weather lay in wait for us off the coast and declaring, with an energetic vehemence, that there would be no supper until he was satisfied that everything was snugged down.

It was after eight bells when, weary in every limb from the labours of the day, I left the mess room with the intention of entering the half deck to snatch forty winks curled up on the settee, while Mr. Boxley was getting his second wind. At the entrance of the alleyway I bumped into a dark figure.

"That you, Tommy-boy?" Burns asked, peering towards me.

"No other!" I answered, the weariness fading away like a mist before the sun.

"The Old Man wants to see you," said he.

"Me?" I exclaimed, my thoughts tumbling over each other, seeking the reason.

"Sure! You!"

"Have I time to wash up first? I'm blacker than a nigger."

"You'd better come as you are. There may be dirty work afoot, an' the blacker you are, the more you'll be fitted for it. He wants you right away! I'm in it too, though I'm blow'd if I know what it's all about. Come on!"

He walked off around the starboard corner of the deck-house and I followed quickly at his heels, wondering what on earth Captain McFarlane could be wanting us for at that time of night and so close to the hour of sailing. It must be something of importance, for seldom did he send for me. I was elated.

In answer to a knock upon his cabin door Captain McFarlane bade us enter. He was sitting in a swivel chair before his desk, writing a letter. He laid down his pen and, swinging around, greeted us with a friendly nod which put us immediately at our ease. At sight of the coal dust smeared on my face with the rain and the bedraggled condition of my dirty sweater, he grinned, but as he commenced to speak, a seriousness came over his eyes.

"Ye ken, laddies, the trouble there has been aboot the Chinese firemen? Weel, it's no' feenished yet. There's a crowd o' them comin' doon frae Liverpool on the eleven o'clock train the night an' they're for us. They've got tae be met an' escorted on board. That would be easy enough, but I heard in the Shippin' Office that the Union delegates ha'e got wind o' it an' they're speirin' tae mak' trouble. It would be easy tae ca' in the police, but the superintendent, who can be gey pernicky whiles, thinks we should be able tae handle it oorselves. He doesna want ony fuss. Ye ken what I mean?" He tapped on the desk with his fingers while his gaze moved from Burns to me. Satisfied that we understood him, he continued: "I could go an' meet them, but the vessel must sail on the tide an' I must be here." His face fell into shadow as he leaned forward in his chair. "I ha'e ordered two wagons—two o' they newfangled wagons that run wi' motors—an' they'll be at the station waitin' for the train. One is tae haud the Chinese, the ither tae carry their gear." He faced Burns and said: "Ye'll tak' charge o' the first," and turning to me, "an' ye'll tak' the ither, an' as quickly as ye can bring them doon tae the vessel. Dinna forget she sails at midnight. It'll be ticklish business but ye should manage it." He smiled as he asked: "D'ye think ye can, laddies?"

Together we answered that we could. Before my eyes flashed a picture of a wagon being chased by a million frenzied sailormen, bent on murder.

Captain McFarlane smiled again and rose to his feet. Digging deeply into his trouser pocket he drew forth a handful of money.

"Here's a pound tae each o' ye," he said, giving us each a sovereign. "Mebbe ye'll need it. Spend it cannily like ye would your own. Remember," he concluded, as we walked towards the door, "the vessel sails on the tide, come what may. If ye canna get doon here on time, I'll ha'e a tugboat waitin' at the Barry Dock pierhead in the mornin' at six." He glanced towards the clock on the bulkhead. "Ye'd better be steppin'. Tak' guid care o' yourselves but dinna be late."

On the deck below Burns slapped me so violently on the back that I gasped for breath.

"Adventure looms ahead, Tommy-boy," he shouted. "Get the coal dust washed off your face, for you're a sight, an' I'll meet you at the gangway in a couple of shakes o' a dead lamb's tail."

I needed no encouragement. Adventure tickled the soles of my feet as I leaped towards the half deck, whooping like a Red Indian with the joy of being alive. Dipping my head in a bucket of water which Spifkins had procured from the pump, I wiped the dirt from my face on to a towel and, hauling off my work clothes and throwing them untidily into a corner, I flung into my brass-bound uniform, transferring the money into an inside jacket pocket. To Spifkins's insistent questioning, I replied:

"It's a secret! Dark deeds at the crossroads. Murder may be done . . . foul, bloody murder! If I don't come back, you can have my sheath knife. Ernie can have my belt. My clothes you can divvy up among the crew. They're more holey than godly but fresh air's good for the skin, or so the doctors say. Think kindly of me! Toodle-ooo!"

Burns was at the gangway, waiting.

"Come on, Tommy-boy!" he shouted.

On the quay wall, which glistened under the flickering



beams of the swinging arc lamps, I swung into step beside him, breasting the wind, which carried a cold rain in from the south, with vigorous strides. Since it was low water, the docks were deserted. I felt the danger of our mission and brushed shoulders with Burns to gain confidence from his strength. He laughed deep down in his throat and, blowing the rain from his nose, he shouted :

"This is the life, Tommy-boy. Oh ! for a cutlass ! I'd rip a belly, or slit a gullet, an' laugh when the white of the eyes rolled up to the sky ! Bring on the pirates !"

At the dock gates we boarded a tramcar which proceeded immediately along Bute Road towards the centre of the town. On the right, beyond the rain-washed pavement, was a paling and beyond that again the long line of the docks. On the left, huddled together like black-cloaked conspirators hatching a plot, were the dismal tenements of Tiger Bay, the most notorious part of sailor town. Villainous-looking men of every nationality lounged on the pavement before dimly-lighted and odiferous public-houses, or, slouching along, entered the dismal doorways of the boarding-houses where, it was whispered, every known vice was practised.

"It's a fine spot for a murder," said Burns.

"It is," agreed the conductor of the tramcar. "Many a man have we taken to his Maker. Picking him up from the tracks with a knife hole in his back an' giving him a free ride an' all. Strong drink and the races—all colours live down here—don't mix very well. The council should do something, but they kowtow to the shipowners, who're after cheap labour."

Shaking his head, he lurched away to the rear of the tramcar. I believed him. On my first voyage I had heard tales of sailormen who had entered Tiger Bay never to be seen again !

Near the centre of the town, which was deserted owing to the rain, we left the tramcar, buttoned our coats up around our necks, and climbed the slope which led up to the station.

"We don't know what we're up against," Burns told me, as we jogged along. "Keep a weather eye open an' a

still tongue. If the worst comes to the worst, we can always run for it. That road," he inclined his head to the left, where a narrow lane branched off into the darkness, "leads to the down-platform end of the station. I was there once to collect some luggage. That road over there on the right will take you to High Street an' the bright lights. Mebbe, too, you'll be able to find a policeman shelterin' in a doorway. But you never can tell on a night like this. Best be prepared to protect yourself. Run like hell, if you have to!"

"I'll run," I assured him with a laugh, and I fell to wondering what lay ahead of us.

At the station Burns sought out the station-master and inquired if the train from Liverpool was on time and if he had any information with regard to the position of the carriage which held the Chinese.

"You're from the *Monarch*, eh?" the station-master mused, and went on to say: "The train's on time and the carriage is the last one on it. You'd better get your men away as quickly as possible. I don't like the look of things. I've had quite a few inquirers to-night about those men and there might be trouble. Only this afternoon two Chinamen were killed in Liverpool when making their way to a vessel. The sailormen are out for blood!"

Burns thanked him and we left the office. We went in search of the motor wagons. They were near the main entrance, behind the cab rank. As we approached them, a group of men came drifting from the shadows of the building and spread out across the pavement. Burns barged through them and, halting beside the first wagon, turned to me and shouted:

"Get up there, Tommy-boy!" He inclined his head towards the second wagon. I moved forward. He went on: "Follow me. We'll have to be smart. We've only got ten minutes in which to make the Roath Dock station!"

Grasping the rail, I stepped on the running-board. A murmur rose from the men. A burly fellow, with a muffler twined around his neck, lurched forward and grasped Burns by the arm. The others closed around menacingly, hemming us in. The odour of rum was

heavy on the damp air. I shivered with apprehension.

"Sy! Mate! Are you from the *Monarch*?" the burly fellow asked pugnaciously.

"Yes," answered Burns cheerfully. "Tommy an' I are apprentices on her."

"Up to meet the Chinks, eh?"

"Yes," Burns answered blandly and, lowering his voice, he adopted a confidential tone. "They're comin' in at the Roath Dock station. The Old Man was tipped off that you were layin' for them an' he made arrangements to have their carriage uncoupled and switched there. He's a wily cus an' laughin' up his sleeve because he's slippin' over on you." He glanced up at the clock on the station tower. He cried excitedly: "We'll have to be goin'! The train's about due!"

Without releasing his grip of Burns's shoulder, the burly fellow nodded his head meaningly and looked around at his mates for their support. They nodded back. He faced Burns again and asked:

"How about givin' us a lift to the Roath Dock station?"

My heart sank with fear. I thought Burns was stumped. But, cool as ever, he countered with: "But you wouldn't get us into trouble, would you now? The Old Man would give us a dog's life if he ever heard. He's a mean swine. You could get a cab an' be there as quickly as we will."

The fellow grimaced knowingly and spat into the gutter. "What d'ye sy, mates?"

"I'd like to do it, y'know," Burns asserted, his eyes roaming around the group meekly, "but, you know, we'd get the very devil of a life. We're only apprentices."

The men grunted knowingly and drew away, arguing in whispers. Burns reached out and squeezed my hand. I wanted to ask his plans but I did not dare. A silence fell upon the group and the burly fellow came over to where we were standing, and, jerking his thumb towards the wagons, said gruffly:

"Get goin'! Me an' m' mates'll be right after ye!"

"Right-o!" shouted Burns cheerfully. He turned to me and ordered: "Get up beside your driver, Tommy-



boy. Keep close behind me. Hurry! We haven't any time to lose!"

He hoisted himself into the first wagon as the sailormen lurched off towards the cab at the head of the rank. I ran along the pavement and climbed into the other. In a moment we were off, speeding down the slope which led from the station.

"Where we goin'?" the driver asked. He was a surly chap and sat stolidly in his seat with a cap pulled well down over his eyes.

"Never mind!" I answered curtly. "Do as you're told. That's what you're paid for."

He muttered something under his breath and bent over the steering-wheel, peering ahead. The first wagon was proceeding at a breakneck speed, water squelching from under the wheels. At the foot of the slope, instead of taking the road which led through the town towards the Roath Dock, it swerved sharply to the right, darting into a narrow, unlighted lane like a rat into a hole. Looking back as we also took the corner, I saw a cab halfway down the slope, the horse picking its way warily on the slippery street. Passing under the shadow of a high warehouse, the wagon ahead swung to the left, then again to the right, and stopped alongside the kerb. Burns jumped out and ran towards me.

"Come on, Tommy-boy. We haven't a minute to lose. This is the down-platform end of the station." He stepped towards the wagon and shouted to the driver: "Keep your engine running!" Shouting again: "Come on!" he sped across the pavement, opened a door, darted through, and to my surprise I found we were within the station. A whistle shrieked and the South Wales express came puffing in. Two porters with a hand truck were pressed into service, and when the train stopped, we were alongside the last carriage, opening the doors.

"Where's Number One?" demanded Burns. "I want catchee Number One Chinaman!"

A corpulent, monkey-faced Chinaman stepped cautiously from the train, glancing nervously to right and left.



"Me Numbley One. What you wantee?" he asked.

Burns reached his side in a giant stride.

"Catchee all men plenty quick!" he shouted. "Sailor-men look-see Chinamen no can go. Suppose men no come plenty quick, men catchee plenty hell. You savvy?"

Number One showed by his actions that he understood. He spoke rapidly in Chinese. The men streamed from the carriage, shouldering their sea bags and carrying, in their hands, pots and pans.

"Herd them to the door!" shouted Burns to me. "Never mind piling the luggage on the truck! They've sighted us!"

Farther down the platform a shout went up. The sailormen, gesticulating threateningly, were racing in our direction. A stone clattered at my feet, another crashed through a window. The Chinese firemen scampered for the door, muttering gutturally in their fright.

"Take it easy!" advised Burns. "Plenty hurry, plenty trouble! Take it easy, Tommy-boy!"

Out on to the pavement I led them, my heart pounding as though it would break through the walls of my chest. Burns came last, banging the door behind him. Into the first wagon the gear was dumped, into the other the firemen clambered.

The door burst open. A volley of stones flung through the darkness. A yelp of pain sent a shiver to my spine and speed to my feet.

"Get goin'!" shouted Burns. He leaped into the wagon beside the Chinese. It started up. "Find your own way to the *Monarch*," he bellowed, as it sped past.

"Aye! Aye!" I shouted back, swinging in beside the firemen's gear. To the driver I cried: "Let her go!"

He snarled under his breath. There was something about his movements I did not like. He fumbled with the lever; he toyed with the gadgets on top of the wheel; he blew the horn, loud and long. A stone, crashing against the bonnet, drew a curse from his lips.

"Get going or we'll both be killed!" I shouted at him.

The possibility must have occurred to him. He jammed in the clutch and the motor went down the slope at a

great speed. The other wagon had disappeared. I became panic-stricken.

"Take the road to the left!" I shouted. Towards the High Street, I thought, lay safety.

The driver ignored the order. He kept straight on, towards Bute Road.

"Here!" I shouted. "Here! What are you playing at?" I clutched his arm.

He shook off my grip. He bent low over the wheel. "What d'ye think I am?" he growled, squinting around fiercely at me. "D'ye think I'd go back on m' own colour? Those yellow bellies should be drowned in the sea. But their luck's in." He laughed mirthlessly. "We'll take their gear down into Tiger Bay an' we'll see what we'll see!"

Tiger Bay! Drink-crazed seamen of all nationalities! Sinister alleys! An inimical neighbourhood!

For a moment I was stunned. I sat on the seat, not knowing what to do. The light in the window of a fried-fish shop rested on me for a fleeting second like a friendly eye, bringing reassurance. I felt around for a weapon. There was none! I thought of crying out for help, but owing to the rain the streets were deserted. The driver must have read my thoughts, for he screwed his face around towards me and said with a sneer:

"They'll cut your bleedin' heart out, boy. They did it to a bloke in Liverpool who put up a fight."

"Shut up!" I shouted back at him. I wanted to smash my fist between his eyes, but there was a chance that we both would have been killed as the wagon crashed into a lamp-post or a building. And anyway, I thought, while there was life there was hope!

The wagon swung to the right into Bute Road, dipped down into the hollow under the railway bridge, and came up into the glow of the sinister lights of Tiger Bay. The fetid odour of the place tugged at the lashings of my stomach. Only the cool, clean rain, beating against my face, prevented me from being actively sick.

Ahead, near a public-house known as the "Black Cat", shadows moved furtively on the pavement. A shout went

up. Men came from doorways and drifted out into the street. The driver gave a series of blasts on the horn and I heard him laughing mirthlessly as I moved over on the seat until my right leg dangled from the tonneau.

The men spread across the street, brandishing sticks and waving their arms. Behind them was a barricade of timber and old furniture. One thought consoled me at that moment. Burns with the Chinese firemen must have escaped ; otherwise the men would not be waiting. The wagon, with a grinding of brakes, had come to a halt. I reached the ground in a bound and, before the men could recover from their surprise, I dashed among them, my head ducked low, and reached a doorway that was shrouded in darkness. In front of me, at the end of a narrow lobby, was the smoke-dulled glow from a room and the sound of raucous, drunken laughter. To the right was a stairway, dismal and forbidding, reeking of opium and the stale odour of beer. A wild outcry from the street spurred me on. Three steps at a time I fled upwards and, reaching the landing, I pulled open a door and entered a room, banging the door behind me.

Panting for breath, I leaned against the wall and peered around, my ears straining for sounds of pursuit. None came. I heaved a sigh of relief and walked towards the window which the grey night revealed. Two steps I had taken when a querulous voice demanded :

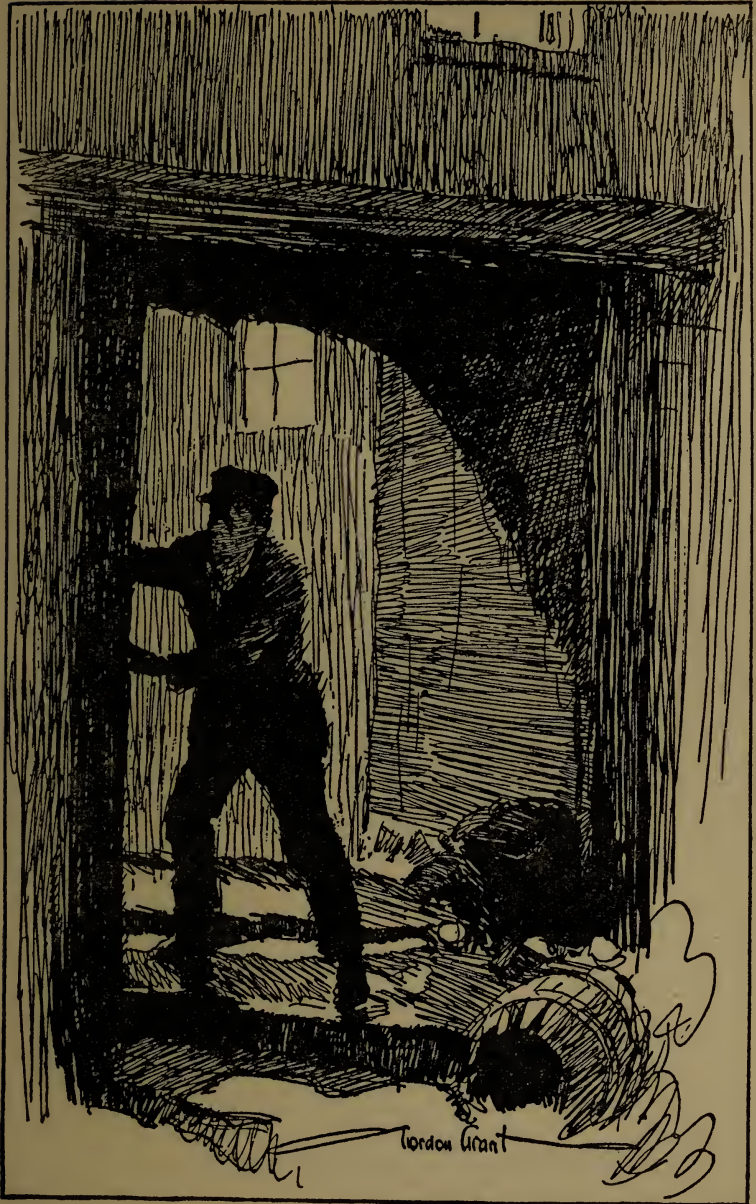
"Wot's all the bleedin' noise ?"

I pressed into the shadow of the wall. On a bed, between me and the window, I saw, as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, the head and shoulders of a stout man.

"Thievin', eh ?" he shouted threateningly, and throwing back the bedclothes he prepared to arise.

Driven to action, I leaped across the room. Grasping the bed I turned it completely over, spilling him on to the floor, where he sprawled about, heaping curses upon my head. Before he could rise again, I had the window open and, swinging from the ledge, had dropped on to the roof of a low building which I concluded to be the wash-house. Cautiously feeling my way, for it was slippery





TREADING CAREFULLY TO MAKE NO SOUND, UNTIL I  
REACHED THE BUTE ROAD





with the rain, I reached the edge and dropped once again into an alleyway cluttered with garbage.

There, for a time, I lay trembling in every limb. Every sound was a menace. I was depressed, too, with the knowledge of failure. Captain McFarlane had given me a job to do and I had failed. Even although I knew that he would smile and say "Ye couldna help it, laddie", my chagrin became so intense that I wished that I had died in defence of the Chinese firemen's luggage.

A distant clock, striking the hour of midnight, brought me back to myself. The *Monarch* would soon be clearing the dock gates for the open sea, her bluff bows bowing to the swell, and I was lying in an alley, cringing like a fool. Rising to my feet, I felt my way along the darkened place, treading carefully to make no sound, until I reached the Bute Road. All was quiet! The sailormen, their wrath expended on the luggage, had returned to the boarding-houses to drink their fill of rotgut rum. I could proceed without molestation.

Barry Docks lay seven miles away. A cab would take me there in less than an hour, but, thought I, why not walk? If I couldn't give the Chinese their luggage, I could return to Captain McFarlane the sovereign he had given to me. The more I thought of it, the lighter became the burden of my depression, and as I trudged along, leaving the town behind, a song came to my lips, easing the weariness from my feet.

Soon the rain eased off and the stars peeped out from the rifts between the clouds and the smell of the sea wrack came in on the breeze. A dog barked, a friendly bark, to be answered afar off, like an echo. Silence again, and the sound of my heels tap-tapping on the dark ribbon of the road. Rounding a bend, I caught a glimpse of the grey water of the Bristol Channel. It showed between the trees and made a soft pattern with the rain-soaked leaves, with here and there the lights of a vessel flashing like jewels.

It was after four o'clock when the Barry Dock pier-heads were gained. I sat down upon the cold planking

to fall asleep with my head resting against a massive iron bollard.

"Ho ! There ! Young fellow-m'-lad !"

Startled, I jumped to my feet, The dawn was a pale green scarf upon the summits of the dark hills. The water was choppy, bumping a white-funnelled tubgoat against the pierhead. A man, his face hidden deep in the collar of a pea-jacket, stood beside me.

"You're for the *Monarch* ?" he asked.

"I am," I answered, shivering with the cold.

"Right you are ! Hop on board. The captain told me to fetch you quickly on board. The storm signals are up and he wants to get clear of the land before the wind comes away !"

Once alongside the *Monarch* Burns gave me a hand across the bulwark rail.

"Gosh ! But I'm glad to see you, Tommy-boy," he said. "I've been thinkin' about you ever since I lost you near the station. But the Old Man wants you—right away !"

Captain McFarlane was on the bridge, watching Mr. Boxley who was on the forecastle head heaving up the anchor. He listened patiently to my story and seemed pleased when I had completed the telling.

"It couldna be helped, laddie. I shouldna have sent ye. Ye'd better keep the sovereign. It's no muckle to gi'e ye for what ye ha'e been through. Nip down an' get intae your workin' clothes an' come up tae the wheel. We're goin' tae sea."

### CHAPTER III

#### A SEA OF FIRE

PAT GREENAWAY, the boatswain, replaced the knife in the sheath fastened to his belt, rose with a grunt of annoyance from the guy which he had stopped up with rope yarns and, gazing aft along the well deck, swore with so much ardour that work ceased momentarily and all eyes turned to him with startled inquiry.

"What's bitin' ye, Boss?" a sailorman asked, winking an eye cockily. "Did ye leave y'r go-t'-meetin' suit in Slim Cragg's boardin'-house or did ye forget t' pay y'r laundry?"

The boatswain, shifting the quid around in his mouth, spat disgustedly into the scupper and, ignoring the facetious questions, continued to gaze aft, his head nodding with perplexity.

Alive with curiosity, I followed the line of his gaze. There was nothing, as far as I could see, to justify the profanity. Peter, Tramer's cat, was capering on a derrick fall like a monkey and trying to see how high he could climb from the deck. Up on the bridge Mr. Selkirk, the stub of a pipe cupped in his hand, leaned over the weather cloth, lazily gazing towards some brown-sailed fishing smacks with half-shut eyes. Over the starboard quarter the land was fast turning to a blue haze along the rim of the horizon, for the *Monarch* was in the chops of the Channel and heading at full speed to the southward, forcing her bow against a freshening breeze.

I let my gaze drift back to the boatswain. He was lifting the guy to drop it down the open hatchway, where all the gear was stowed to protect it from the weather during the long passages. I walked over to him. As I lent a hand, I asked:

"Did you really see something to swear about, Bos'n, or were you just exercising your lungs?"



He dropped the guy to the deck, the heavy wooden blocks missing my feet by inches. I leaped backwards in the nick of time. He surveyed me with an angry stare.

"Bhoy!" he snapped, placing a hand on his hip and leaning towards me aggressively. "It's the youth an' innocence that's in ye that saves y'r backside from feelin' the lift o' m' foot." He twisted around from the waist and pointed a quivering finger towards the derrick fall. "D'ye see that cat, bhoy, behavin' loike it had a divil under its skin?" he asked. I nodded, with an effort controlling a grin. He went on, his voice lowered to an awed whisper. "Well, bhoy, it's tryin' t' tell us that there's the very brute of a gale headin' this way an' sure's m' ould mither's rottin' in her grave, it'll be here afore the day is out." He pursed his lips and concluded with scathing emphasis, "Now be gettin' on with y'r work. Sure it's lazy ye are an' there's no sense in y'r head at all!"

Peter was a black, sea-going cat that had made three voyages on the *Monarch*, visiting the shore at every port of call but always returning on the day of sailing, very dirty and with a hangdog expression on his impudent face. Tramer had brought him on board as a kitten, and no matter how short our rations became, he always saved a little from his plate for his pet.

Now as I looked at Peter clawing on the derrick fall, I saw him in a new light, endowing him with the utility of a barometer. As the day advanced, bringing indications of an approaching storm, he became an object of superstitious awe!

But when I went to the wheel at eight bells in the first night watch, he slipped from my thoughts. It was blowing half a gale and the sea was afire with phosphorescence, every breaking crest a leaping flame, every hollow aglow with smouldering embers. The *Monarch*, heaving and falling gently to the rising sea, was a ravaging dragon, flame darting from under her bows as each wave was broken and rolled over. The clouds, pressed low with the murkiness within them, made the night otherwise black as pitch, and as I stood at the wheel, looking out

through the open lee door, it seemed as if the end of the world was close at hand.

Suddenly a stab of fear pierced my heart. My eyes gaped open ; my hands, upon the wheel, were clammy and cold ; my body became rigid like a bar of iron, and try as I could, I was not able to turn my head away or open my lips to shout for help.

From under the clouds a reddish ball of fire floated like a balloon, and when not more than a hundred feet away from where I stood it exploded with a hissing sound. Another appeared, and another, both exploding before they reached the phosphorescent sea. I thought we were being bombarded by a celestial armada and that it would only be a matter of minutes before the *Monarch* would sink beneath the waves.

But minutes passed and the *Monarch* did not sink. Indomitably she forged ahead, each beat of her engines a gesture of defiance to the elements, each lift of her bluff bow a taunt. Confidence passed from her to me. I looked at the compass which, for the moment, I had neglected. Ten degrees from the course ! With a feeling of guilt I moved the wheel, one spoke at a time, so that Captain McFarlane, below in his cabin, could not hear the gears grunt and look up at the telltale compass over his bunk. Then, once more steadied on the course, I stepped towards the wheelhouse door with the intention of asking Burns, who was on watch, about the strange phenomenon. But I took one step and stood stock-still, rooted by a fear more overpowering than that I had first experienced.

The balls of fire had settled on the vessel ; on the top of the jack staff up in the prow, on the foremast head, on the davit crowns, and along the jumper stay they raced one after the other, all crackling with a noise like fiendish laughter. The sea, too, had become more luminous and more wild, with fewer dark hollows between the darting tongues of flame above which there seemed to float a film of blazing air.

It was the end ! Armageddon was upon the sea ! My lips parted but no sound came forth. I glanced towards

the compass, not knowing what drew my eyes towards it. The white card, illuminated dimly by the small colza lamp in the binnacle cover, held level in the bowl as the vessel pitched and rolled and seemed to whisper, "Always on an even keel ! Always on an even keel !" The thought brought me up with a round turn, steadied me. If there was danger, face it standing up. I laughed with relief and, leaning from the wheelhouse door, called loudly :

"Bruce ! Bruce ! Are you there ?"

"What d'ye want, laddie ?"

Captain McFarlane's question struck me like a blow between the eyes and I jumped back to my position behind the wheel in double-quick time, feeling that I had put my foot in it with a vengeance. I had thought him in his bunk below !

He backed to the door and halted with one foot on either side of the sill, edging close in to escape the full force of the wind. The spray, when it struck his face, glistened with a myriad phosphorescent jewels and his black oilskin was a cloak of gold, as it reflected the brilliance of the night. He eased the sou'wester on his brow and looked around at me.

"Did ye want something, laddie ?" he asked in a kindly voice.

"N—no, sir !" I stammered, surprised. I had expected a reprimand.

"Were ye worryin' aboot the sea ?" he asked, and before I could answer, he went on, as though musing to himself: "It seems tae be burnin' up like a hill o' dried bracken. It minds me o' a night in Skye an' the folk fleein' frae their crofts. The wee fishes must be gey frightened. Mebbe they're swimmin' awa' doon where it's black as a hob. Ye'll be seein' the electricity playin' on the masts, laddie ? It's bonnie but fearsome an' death comes ahint it, like a cart after a horse. It's an auld wives' tale but there's muckle o' truth in it. I've seen it happen time an' time again, laddie. Aye, time an' time again." He paused, engrossed with his thoughts, his gaze directed through the wheelhouse window to the flame upon the jack staff in the stem. He continued : "Some ca' it St.



Elmo's fire, ithers corposant. They're high-soundin' names for the electricity that's floating in the atmosphere an' which we canna often see. The balloons o' light ye saw were will-o'-the-wisps an' presage disaster. They're harmless in themselves but I dinna like them. I'll be glad, laddie, when another day comes up."

Adjusting the sou'wester on his head, he left the wheelhouse and walked out on to the wing of the bridge, where Burns was standing behind the weather cloth, sheltered from the full heft of the wind. I watched him for a moment, when gave all my attention to the steering, for the gale had increased until the wind, shrieking through the rigging, made a wild, barbaric symphony, and the seas, following each other in destructive succession, hurled against the bow, throwing a curtain of iridescent spray high into the air and forcing the *Monarch* from her course. With the rudder now half-way to port, now half-way to starboard, I clung to the weather door-knob or stood braced between the hub of the wheel and the after bulkhead and brought her back, while within me there surged wave upon wave of illimitable power. I was the master of a prancing steed of wood and steel! Measuring my voice to the cadence of the storm, I opened my lips and sang :

"Blow the man down, bullies, blow the man down,  
Away-hay—blow the man down ;  
Blow the man down, bullies, blow him right down,  
Give us a chance to blow the man down.

"Blow him right down from the top of his crown,  
Away-hay—blow the man down ;  
Blow him right down from the top of his crown,  
Give us a chance to blow the man down !"

Soon the phosphorus left the water and the night settled down black upon the sea. Burns came into the wheelhouse, the oilskin coat flapping around his knees.

"You'd better change your tune, Tommy-boy," he said. "The Old Man's a bit worried, an' he might blame you for causin' the gale. He says the barometer is fallin' fast



an' he doesn't like the look of things. You'd better pipe down or sing into yourself."

He went out again. A sea, crashing over the fore-castle head, sent a whiplash of spray down on the wind full into his face. The *Monarch* staggered and heeled over to port with the weight of water upon the forward well. Captain McFarlane shouted :

"Put her on half speed, Mister !"

As the vessel eased down, he came to the wheelhouse door and ordered curtly :

"Let her come to south ! We'll heave her to before she breaks herself up. Let me know if she doesna steer !"

"Aye ! Aye, sir !" I answered, and I ventured : "I think it's getting better, sir."

"It'll be lots worse afore it's better, laddie," Captain McFarlane said. "There's the makin's o' a whole gale out yonder. I dinna like it."

Something in his tone depressed me, but when I turned in at midnight, the storm had not increased and I snuggled into my damp blankets thinking that he might possibly have been mistaken.

## CHAPTER IV

### CATASTROPHE DURING A GALE

THE wind was screeching through the rigging with hurricane force when I left the mess room at eight bells in the morning watch and, grasping the storm-rail on the after house, pulled myself along the slanting, sea-swept deck to the bridge, over which the spray flung in a constant stream. The day was sultry and heavy. The *Monarch* was lifelessly rising and falling to the growling combers with an uncomfortable list to port. Everything glistened with water. The decks were deserted.

McCarthy passed the wheel over to me with a grunt of disgust.

"South's the course," said he, "or as near to south as ye can keep her. She's a bitch!" He buttoned the oil-skin coat more tightly around his neck and, as he was about to leave, glanced towards the compass, which was swinging about incessantly, and said: "She's takin' it hard over both ways. Ye'll have to work for a change!"

He laughed harshly and went out on to the bridge to report the course. I gave all my attention to the steering. A cough turned my gaze to the door. Captain McFarlane stood with one leg over the sill, eyeing me.

"Try an' keep her steady, laddie," he cautioned and he smiled kindly. His voice was alert and cheerful, but his face was drawn and grey with the anxieties of the night. After he had lighted his pipe, he said: "It's up to you, laddie. Let me know if she falls off too far."

He went out again on to the weather wing of the bridge, his shoulders rounded, his chin buried in the collar of his oilskin coat.

A long hour passed. The steering became more difficult every minute. The vessel was like a colt in harness with the smell of the green hills in his nostrils. I couldn't

hold her to her course. Then, as if to add to my labours, a succession of seas spilled green over the forecastle head. The weight of water on the forward well hampered her, making her sluggish and holding her down by the nose. I ran to the wheelhouse window and knocked loudly on the glass with my knuckles. Captain McFarlane glanced over his shoulder.

"She won't hold up, sir," I shouted, hoping that he would hear. "She's falling off!"

He answered me with a wave of his hand. I hastened back to the wheel to hold it hard over to port.

Burns came into the wheelhouse and blew down the speaking tube to the engine-room. A voice, calm and reassuring, answered him from the bowels of the vessel.

"Give her three more revolutions, Fourth, an' not a bit more," Burns ordered, and when the acknowledgment came from below, he turned to me and said: "Watch her now, Tommy-boy. She's liable to bury herself with too much speed. Let the Old Man know when she steers."

I nodded, too absorbed in my task to speak.

For a time the vessel hung closer to her course. She was easier on the wheel. I was on the point of informing Captain McFarlane when Burns, shouting excitedly, took my attention.

"Look! Sir! Look at that one!"

Instantly Captain McFarlane was at the wheelhouse door, his body tense with excitement.

"Watch your helm now, my lad! There's a brute coming!" His voice was hoarse, but the words snapped out from between his lips, throwing waves of anxiety around my head. He struggled into the face of the wind and bellowed to Burns: "Put her on slow! Pass word along to hang on!" He came aft again to the wheelhouse door, shouting at the top of his lungs: "Hold on! Hold on there!"

The engine-room telegraph clanged, challenging the frightful noises of the storm with its rasping clatter. The answer came from below. Burns swung into the centre of the bridge, shouting: "Look out below! Look out below!" Mr. Boxley, coming up the ladder from the

bridge deck, was caught and held back by the hurricane squall that shrieked over the weather cloth as the vessel pitched. His oilskin coat bellied with wind and, with the crack of a rifle, ripped up the back. A laugh sprang to my lips . . . halted there. A voice at my elbow shouted : "Watch her now, laddie ! Watch her !"

The vessel was on her course . . . steady ! The wheel was halfway to port, holding her against the terrific onslaught of the squall, which came with sudden rushes of crazy wind from over the starboard bow, whistling shrilly. To ease the tension within me, I let my gaze drift from the compass to the spray-washed wheelhouse window and, with a sinking feeling of apprehension, wished immediately that I had not. Close ahead there was nothing but water. Dark and solid as a mountain it towered over the *Monarch*, then leaped forward with a frightful onrush. The vessel took the slanting mass at the right angle as I clung helplessly to the wheel. Up, up she rose until the sea was lost and only the smother of low-hung clouds lay beyond the streaming bow. Then down, down she came, diving madly, and there, waiting, was the succeeding wave into which she was surely falling.

I saw the fury of the spume-curling comber . . . heard it roar . . . saw it break . . . break with the heft of a ninety-mile wind behind it. Petrified, I shut my eyes. Instantly they were open. Burns was standing braced against the windbreak, his arms outstretched, his fingers grasping the roping of the weather cloth over which his head was thrust, bared to the gale.

"Tramer ! Tramer !" he screamed. "Get back ! Get back !" He drew back his right arm and snapped it sharp forward with fingers outspread, as if clearing a space for his voice to penetrate the wild piping of the squall. His cry rose to a wail. "Get back ! Tramer ! Tramer ! Oh ! My God !" With a gesture of futility, he crouched down behind the windbreak as the avalanche of destructive water leapt over the bow.

The *Monarch*, fifteen thousand tons of steel and cargo, staggered at the blow, recovered slightly with a stubborn quiver, as if surprised at the ferocious attack, then seemed



to be carried back before the wave's relentless force. To starboard, into the solid water, she rolled dangerously, and with a thunderous roar the comber burst over the forecastle head to race along the decks beneath a curtain of blinding spray, and I heard the rending of iron and the crashing of resisting wood. The wheelhouse windows smashed with the crack of a whip. Glass flew around me . . . wind staggered me . . . water choked me. Gritting my teeth, I clung to the wheel. In a moment of panic I recalled what Burns had once told me. "Never turn your back on a sea, Tommy-boy, or on a danger. Face them standin' up!" I did so, waiting for the vessel to be engulfed!

Moments were an eternity of time. Through the drumming of the water driving past my ears came the awful crashes of catastrophe. I wondered if the vessel wasn't breaking in two, so noisily was she labouring and straining amidships. I didn't want her to sink that way. How much better it would be if she sank on an even keel, her red funnel a symbol of defiance to the last.

Suddenly through the tumult came the voice of Captain McFarlane: "Look out there! Hold him!"

Mr. Boxley bellowed: "You can't do it! Get back!"

"But it's Tramer . . . Tramer!" cried Burns.

"What of it?" demanded Mr. Boxley. "He was a useless article, anyway. Get back! Are you crazy? Get back, I tell you! By the Lord Harry, I'll smash you!"

Wiping the water from my face I opened my eyes and looked out through the wheelhouse door. Mr. Boxley was struggling with Burns on the wing of the bridge. Burns had thrown off his oilskin coat and his sea boots lay in a corner of the cab where they had been kicked off. He ceased to struggle and, turning his gaze from Mr. Boxley's face to leeward, he said:

"Can't something be done? He'll be drowned!"

Mr. Boxley sniffed. "He'll be drowned, all right," he snorted. "You'd be, too, if you went out there. He's not the first one nor will he be the last." He lurched over towards where Captain McFarlane was standing by the rail, gazing off the quarter. "It would be useless to send a boat, sir. It wouldn't live . . ."

"It wouldn't live . . ." reiterated Captain McFarlane, as though to himself, his eyes buried beneath his brows. He lifted his gaze towards the wheelhouse. "Put y'r helm taw port, laddie, an' let her come back tae her course," he ordered and, shaking his head, he stepped aside as the boatswain clattered up the ladder to the bridge.

"Tramer . . . he's gone, sorr !" shouted the boatswain.

"What of it ?" snapped Mr. Boxley. "D'you think we're blind ?"

Captain McFarlane motioned him to silence. He turned to the boatswain.

"What did ye give the laddie tae do, tae tak' him oot on the deck as the sea was heavin' aboard ?" he asked.

"Sure, an' nothin', sorr," asserted the boatswain, with some vehemence. "It was after that blamed cat he was. The divil take it !"

"Was the cat drowned too ?"

"Sure, sorr, an' may the . . ."

"Enough !" snapped Captain McFarlane. He turned wearily to Mr. Boxley and said : "Tak' a walk around. All the damage must be to the superstructure or else the second mate would ha'e reported. Repair what ye can."

He entered the wheelhouse to stand by the binnacle with his eyes fixed on the compass. The wind had eased off with the passing of the squall and the vessel held within two points of her course, only occasionally yawing wildly. I was glad that I had something to do. Tramer was gone ! I could hardly believe it, the accident had been so swift. I shivered, thinking of him out there alone in that welter of water.

"It couldna be helped, laddie," Captain McFarlane muttered wistfully, gently shaking his head. "It would ha'e been foolhardy tae send a boat out in such weather. One life doesna matter so very much when so many are at stake." His voice faltered and he was silent. The water, dripping from the brim of his sou'wester on to the compass bowl, resembled large tears. A lump came into my throat and I swallowed hard. I wanted to be in the half deck, hiding my face on a pillow, for I was exhausted with emotion and on the verge of weeping. He went on : "It's

a fate that aye waits for a sailorman, laddie. The auld wives moan aboot it but it canna be sae bad . . . for the sailorman, I mean." He glanced around at me. "Dinna tak' it tae heart, laddie. The sun'll be shinin' the morn an' ye'll soon forget a' aboot it."

He left the wheelhouse and walked out on to the bridge and, after speaking to Burns, descended to the deck below. Burns, after casting his eyes around the horizon, came into the wheelhouse.

"The ship's a wreck, Tommy-boy," he said. "The saloon bulkhead has been laid flat on the tables, the lifeboats have been torn from their gripes and smashed to atoms—he couldn't have launched one if he had wanted to—all the weather cabin doors are battered in, and the poop's in a mess. It was the biggest sea I've ever seen. Gosh! I don't want to see another like it!"

The question uppermost in my mind faltered on my lips. I couldn't bring myself to voice it. But as Burns turned to walk away, I forced it out.

"D—did you see him go, Bruce?" I asked.

He turned slowly to look at me. His buoyant blue eyes were dull and full of pain.

"Yes, Tommy-boy, I saw him," said he. For a moment he was silent; then he continued very quickly: "First I saw the cat. It came out from beneath the winches as the sea piled up, shakin' the water from its paws. Then I saw Tramer standin' by under the fo'c'sle head, yarnin' to the sailormen. One of them—I suppose because he knew that it was Tramer's—said something laughingly about the cat. Tramer biffed the man in the jaw with his fist, then dashed out from the shelter as the sea broke." He paused for a second to loosen the oilskin from around his neck. "I didn't see him again until he was out there." He nodded to leewards and went on: "His arm was above water, wavin'. He must have been frightened, Tommy-boy. The water's so cold an' there's so much of it. Mebbe he had his cat, though. It was swept away too."

He walked out again on to the bridge and stood behind the windbreak with his hands over the top of the weather cloth and his face resolutely in the wind. He had said



nothing about his attempt to dive overboard to the rescue. I wondered if he was glad that Mr. Boxley had restrained him, thereby saving his life, or if he felt the ignominy of defeat, blaming himself for being so easily restrained. As I wondered, a happiness possessed me. Selfishly I was glad that he had been prevented from leaping into that seething, destructive water. Tramer meant little to me. Already his death was fading into the past.

It was ten o'clock. I struck four bells.

Andrews, a sailorman, came up the ladder very promptly to relieve me. His face was flushed with exertion and he gave a sly wink as he took his place behind the wheel.

"This is the place to be on a morning' like this," said he. "The mate's on the rampage an' sweatin' the guts out o' all hands. You'd think to hear him swear that he'd never been in a gale before."

"But this is an extra bad one, isn't it?" I asked, as I backed slowly towards the door.

"A bad one?" Andrews scoffed, twisting his face into a smirk. "Why! We lost three men in one I was in last year. Three men! Not a bloomin' boy! What d'you think of that?"

I didn't know what to think. I had heard tales of sailormen being washed overboard and drowned off the Horn but never in the chops of the Channel. I was inclined to believe that Andrews was lying, but how was I to know? His beady eyes were narrowed in an enigmatic sneer. I decided to ignore him.

"Course is south," I told him. "She's holding to it fairly well with two turns of port helm."

I turned to go. He reached out and grasped my arm. With one foot over the sill I halted and looked back over my shoulder at him.

"You were in his cabin?" he asked.

"Whose cabin?" I demanded.

"You know. The chap who was drowned."

"What of it?" I was riled at his familiarity.

"Easy does it, mate." His voice sank to a confidential whisper. "How about slippin' me some of his clothes



before the Old Man orders the steward to collect his gear? The trousers should fit me. He was about my build."

I looked at him incredulously, unable to believe my ears.

"You see, the Old Man will sell them, anyway. You might as well divvy them up. You could keep the best things for yourself."

If the vessel hadn't rolled so heavily with a gurgle of water along her run, I would have struck him as he stood at the wheel and taken the consequences of my rash act. But it took all my strength to cling to the doorway while I shouted with all the bitter emphasis I could muster:

"You lousy swine!"

Anger blazed in Andrews's eyes. With one hand on the wheel he stepped towards me and then as quickly stepped back, giving all his attention to the compass.

"What's the matter, Tommy-boy?" Burns asked. He was close behind me, his legs astride, bracing himself against the roll.

"N—nothing, sir," I answered, covering my confusion with a short laugh.

"It didn't sound like nothin'." He contemplated Andrews with a belligerent stare. "Keep your attention on the steering an' your tongue in your cheek, or I'll have something to say to you," he admonished curtly. He walked over and put a hand on my shoulder. "Nip down below, Tommy-boy, an' tell the Old Man that it's finin' away. I think she'll stand half speed. Go in quietly. He may be asleep in his chair."

"Aye! Aye, sir!"

Sliding down the handrails so as to make no noise, I walked around the after end of the lower bridge house and entered the chart room, closing the door gently behind me. Water swished about in the saloon, which was on the deck below, and a musty, damp odour came up the companionway, causing a slight perspiration to settle on my brow.

The curtain over Captain McFarlane's doorway was drawn, though shaking in an eddying draught. I knocked

on the bulkhead with my knuckles, gently at first, then louder. No answer. Reaching out I grasped the curtain and pulled it aside with a tinkle of brass rings and peered within. The cabin was in deep gloom. Iron deadlights protected the glass of the ports from being broken by the assault of the seas and only faint glimmers of light filtered between the cracks beneath the thumbscrews, reflecting on the brass drawer handles like streaks of gold.

"Captain McFarlane! Are you there, sir?" I called again and again, louder each time.

No answer!

Fearfully I stepped into the cabin and, with one hand on the bunkboard, glanced around, my ears alert for the sound of his breathing. Objects took shape. The table! The chair! The desk! The clothes hanging on the hooks at the head of the settee! But Captain McFarlane was nowhere to be seen.

Strangely perturbed, I wondered where he could be. Seldom during the passage of a storm did he leave the bridge, food and drink being brought there to him. Perhaps he had gone to survey the damage to the saloon? It would have to be repaired before the *Monarch* could buffet another gale. As I listened, I thought I heard the voices of men beneath where I stood. Possibly they were shoring up the broken bulkhead.

Quickly I left the cabin and gained the top of the companionway. Below in the alleyway the water, flecked with light which came through the strained seams of the door, surged back and forth with an ominous swishing. I descended towards it, clinging to the banister and feeling my way, one step at a time.

Half-way down I stopped, petrified. A scream stifled on my lips. A cold sweat came out all over my body. My foot had touched something soft!

For the time I did not know what to do. I could not go forward and I could not go back. Terror, intensified by the nerve-wracking events of the morning, held me in a vice. I was afraid to look down, fearful of what might confront me, yet one thought emerged through the murk in my brain and chained me to the spot. Something had

to be done and quickly ! Slowly and surely, like an anchor to windward, it brought my courage back.

Resolutely I looked down. Brass buttons gleamed like glassy eyes in the gloom. Sinking to my knees on the companionway steps, I ran my fingers along the length of the coat, until they touched the soft hair of a beard.

"Captain McFarlane ! Captain McFarlane !" I cried, caressing the cold skin of his face.

He did not answer !

The water surged over my hand, covered my wrist. His legs were up the companionway, his head at the foot. I thought he was drowned.

"Help ! Help !" I cried.

Leaping over him, I landed in the alleyway and burst open the door into the saloon. Mr. Boxley and the sailormen were wedging wooden toms against the forward bulkhead, over which the water from the well deck was cascading like a waterfall over the cliff.

"What's all the noise about ?" demanded Mr. Boxley, resting his top maul on the table on which he was standing, and glaring down at me.

"The captain, sir ! The captain, sir ! He's dead !" I cried.

"Fiddlesticks !" retorted Mr. Boxley. "He was in here a minute ago !"

"He's lying in the alleyway . . . in the water !" I yelled, pointing through the door which I held open.

Mr. Boxley craned his head and looked past me with a scornful look in his eyes. At that instant Captain McFarlane's inert body slid down the companionway and passed the door, rolling from side to side. A muttering came from the sailormen and they backed away.

Mr. Boxley leaped from the table and, striding across the saloon, knocked me to one side with a vicious sweep of his left arm.

"Why didn't you say he was hurt ?" he bellowed as he barged through the doorway with water swishing around his legs.

He picked Captain McFarlane up as though he was a

child and, glancing over his shoulder with anger blazing in his eyes, he addressed the sailormen :

“Blast your craven souls ! Come here ! Two of you !”

When they came forward, he placed the body in their arms. “Take him up into his cabin an’ lay him on the settee,” he ordered, “and watch out his ghost doesn’t get you !” He swung on me and shouted : “Get hold of the chief steward and tell him to attend to the captain. There’s more important work for me to do.” He glared around at the sailormen who were standing by, looking on. “What’s this ? A holiday because the captain’s hurt !” he bellowed. “Get that shore into place or, by the Lord Harry, I’ll smarten you up with the weight of my fist !”

He leaped back on to the table as I hastened from the saloon.



## CHAPTER V

### CAPTAIN McFARLANE HOVERS NEAR DEATH

CAPTAIN McFARLANE lay on his bunk, stiffened into a strange, unnatural immobility by the accident which had overtaken him. His face, framed between the white counterpane and the pillow, was pinched and drawn, and his eyes, when the light from the port fell upon them, were haunted with an uncanny stare. He seldom moved and then only to let his gaze rest for a few seconds on the telltale compass which was on the deck head directly above his head. If he comprehended what he saw, he never disclosed it, nor by look or sign did he indicate that he knew I sat on the chair by the table watching him.

When the chief steward returned to the saloon and reported that the captain had "a bad crack on the skull" and that he was "clean out of himself", Mr. Boxley had furrowed his brows with perplexity, sworn heartily, then swung towards me and said:

"Get your oilskins off, boy. We'll make a nursemaid out o' you."

"But . . . but, sir, I . . ." I protested, having no inclination for the job.

"Enough!" he snorted, banging his top maul against the bulkhead to emphasize his command. "There's no but about it. It'll do your soft heart a bit of good to see some pain . . . harden it up for sea use." He must have noticed the tears in my eyes, for, in a softer voice, he went on: "It can't be helped, boy. There's work to be done and I can't spare any of the men. The other boys are a bit young and a bit wobbly in the insides with the gale. Get your oilskins off an' let's have no more nonsense!"

I dropped my oilskins to the deck where I stood and followed him up the companionway to the captain's cabin. The air was heavy with the odour of friar's balsam and on the table, near a basin that was slopping over, lay rags

saturated with blood. The chief steward, who had preceded us, stood in his shirt sleeves by the head of the bunk, wringing his hands and muttering under his breath while he gazed at the white face on the pillow.

"He's terribly hurt," he moaned.

Mr. Boxley snapped his fingers with angry impatience. He breathed noisily through his nose. He reached forward and grasped the chief steward by the shoulder.

"Pick that gear up," he said, nodding towards the table, "and get to blazes out o' here. You'd think we were in a lady's boudoir!" He pushed the chief steward through the doorway, then motioned me to his side. I walked over, keeping away from the bunk. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "A dying man can't hurt you!" He grinned at his coarse jest and continued, lowering his voice to a whisper. "Pay no attention to that drivelling fool, the chief steward. The Old Man won't die. He's got a slight concussion, that's all. He's got to be kept quiet. It's up to you to do it. He always liked your blue eyes an' that should help. I don't want him tearing around as though he owned the vessel. I've got enough on my hands as it is. Keep him here. If you can't, I will, and it won't be with a kind look." He glanced towards the bunk, then, with a sniff of disdain, walked towards the door with rolling strides. Before descending the companionway he looked around and said: "If you want me, ring the bell!"

For a long while I stood by the table, afraid to move in case the slightest noise would rouse Captain McFarlane from the stupor in which he lay. Men with a fracture of the skull were liable to be violent and, in violence, they died. I didn't want him to die. Let him remain asleep, I prayed, over and over again.

As the morning waned, the trepidation left me. Moving quietly around the cabin, I unscrewed the deadlights and opened the ports to let the cool, fresh wind displace the stagnant air. The gale had eased away and the sun was out in a cloudless sky and the *Monarch* rolled along to a high, beam swell. I thought, as I tidied up, that it wouldn't be long before Captain McFarlane was on his

feet again. He seemed so peaceful, breathing like a child.

The chief steward brought my dinner up into the chart-room and, after making a cursory examination of the captain, he whispered into my ear :

"He's in a bad way. He has a crack on his head that long." He measured six inches or more with his fingers. He nodded knowingly as he vouchsafed the information. "He must have fallen backwards and banged his head against one of the brass treads. Age weakens the muscles."

His garrulity destroyed my appetite. I toyed with the food, then asked him to take it away. It didn't seem quite right that I should be eating, with Captain McFarlane lying so close to death. Nor could I understand the callousness of Mr. Boxley. He came into the cabin after dinner, smoking his pipe, stood beside the bunk with a gloating smirk on his red face and, as he turned to leave, said to me :

"Looks like the fishes will get him, boy. They'll suck his bones clean as a whistle. Hmmm !"

Sinking down into the chair beside the table, I groped through the inner recesses of my mind to find a cure for concussion of the brain. Surely, I reflected, I must have heard something. When, utterly dejected because nothing would come to me, I searched around the cabin to see if a message would be written on the dark, mahogany walls, my gaze settled upon a book, blue and thin, which lay, with some others, on the desk, jammed in a corner. I knew it instantly. It was "The Ship-Captain's Medical Guide" ! Picking it up with trembling fingers, I opened it quickly and, under the heading, "Concussion of the Brain", read avidly :

If the injury is severe, he loses his senses ; his body is cold ; he lies as if in a deep sleep, but can be roused by shouting some familiar question in his ear, when he will answer, and immediately go off to sleep again. This drowsiness may last from one to forty-eight hours.

*Treatment* : Keep him quiet ; give him nothing by the mouth, or you may choke him ; wrap him up in a warm blanket, and apply warmth to his feet.



Stealthily, my heart palpitating wildly, I approached the bunk and over Captain McFarlane laid all the blankets I could find; then, taking off my jacket, I wrapped it around his feet. With an intense feeling of satisfaction I tiptoed back to the chair and sank into it. Now, thought I, Mr. Boxley will sing a different tune. At that moment I hated him fervidly, for I surmised, by his manner, that he desired to assume command!

The sun was yellow in the west, sending two ribbons of dazzling light through the starboard ports, when I started up in fright from a sound sleep into which I had fallen. The air was cold. I shivered and folded my arms to still the chattering of my teeth. It was then, as I looked up, that I perceived that Captain McFarlane's eyes were open! How long had he been awake? Had he wanted me? Guiltily I moved to attract his attention. He gave no sign. I was relieved.

The sun went down, the twilight came and then darkness fell upon a sea that was smooth and black as ebony. I rose and lighted the lamps, shading the bright flicker of the matches with my cupped hands.

I was settling again in the chair when I heard a whisper: "Laddie! Laddie!"

Captain McFarlane hadn't moved but his eyes were turned towards me. Quickly I was by his side. A wan smile passed over his face and in a voice so low that I could scarcely hear it he commenced to sing an old Hebridean song, "The Sea Gull of the Land-Under-Waves." Again and again he sang it, until the passionate sorrow of the melody seemed to wrench the heart right out of me. I wanted him to be quiet, to rest. A bright thought came to me. I sang it to him.

"Snow-white sea gull, say  
O-hi-me sea gull, say  
Where, Ah! where thou'st left them,  
White sea gull, say  
Where our fair young lads are resting,  
Ho-rin-yail-i-o  
O-i-vo o-i-ri-vo  
Grief within my heart is nesting.



“Back to back they lie, lifeless lie,  
Breath nor sigh from their cold lips coming,  
Sea-wrack their shroud  
And their harps the sea’s sad crooning,  
Horionn e-le-o  
O-ibh-o o-i-ri-bho  
And their dirge the sea’s sad crooning.”

The song brought a measure of peace to him. He seemed to relax and fall into a sleep. I went into the chart-room to eat the sandwiches that had been left there for me. Burns looked up from the chart on which he was laying off courses.

“How is he, Tommy-boy?” he asked in a whisper.

“I don’t know. He doesn’t seem to be very well. He was singing. Isn’t that a bad sign?”

Burns furrowed his brows and shook his head perplexedly. “I don’t know,” he stated. “Mebbe it is. It won’t matter much. We’re . . .”

He paused abruptly and shot a startled glance at me. I was rooted where I stood. A wild, angry cry had come from Captain McFarlane.

For a second only I hesitated; then I dashed into the cabin, followed by Burns. Captain McFarlane was sitting upright on the bunk, shouting incoherently and pointing excitedly towards the telltale compass above his head. I put an arm around his shoulders to soothe him and ease him to the pillow. He fought me away, crashing his fist into my face. Blood spurted from my nose. Retreating as Burns took my place beside the bunk, I chanced to glance at the compass. The vessel was four points to port of the course she had been steering throughout the day! Had Captain McFarlane, I wondered, been conscious all the time of what was taking place upon the bridge? Did he feel his responsibility even when sick unto death?

I didn’t have long to wonder, for Burns was having his hands full by the bunk.

“It’s all right, sir! It’s all right, sir!” he cried in a conciliatory tone, while endeavouring to hold Captain McFarlane in the bunk without too much force.

But Captain McFarlane wouldn't be held. He kicked and fought like a demon. He threw the pillow and the blankets to the deck. He screamed hideously, struggling to utter words that would not form on his tongue. He forced his legs over the bunk board and, kicking Burns back against the table, he leaped to the deck and staggered toward the chart-room, reeling from side to side like a drunken man.

Reaching the door ahead of him, I blocked the way. He halted and seemed to shrivel up as a look of utter amazement came into his eyes.

"Laddie! Laddie!" he whispered.

I moved over beside him, put my arm around his waist.

"Everything's all right, sir," I assured him. "Won't you come back to your bunk?"

He nodded uncomprehendingly and permitted me to turn him around. But we had not taken more than two steps when he flew into a rage again, swinging his elbow into my face so that I fell heavily against the bunk. The bell was close to my hand. I pressed it. Almost instantly, it seemed, Mr. Boxley stood in the doorway, his pea-jacket buttoned up about his neck, his hard-weather hat pulled down over his ears.

"What's all this?" he demanded, while his eyes darted around the cabin, to come to rest at last on Captain McFarlane, who was crouching down like an animal about to spring.

Burns spoke. "I believe he's out of his mind. We can do nothing with him."

Mr. Boxley's jaw set ruthlessly like a trap. His brows lowered until his eyes became dark hollows in his head. "So!" he said, sniffing disdainfully.

He caught Captain McFarlane in his huge hands as he leaped towards the door and shook him like a rat.

I thought he would kill him before our eyes. I ran forward and clung with all my strength to Mr. Boxley's arm.

"Don't hurt him!" I cried. "Oh! Don't do that!"

"Get back, boy!" thundered Mr. Boxley. "I'm in

charge now. You've made a pretty mess o' things. Get back, I tell you!"

I slunk back, cowed to silence by the peremptory vitality of the voice. Intuition told me, as my thoughts became calmed, that possibly Mr. Boxley knew what he was about. He acted that way.

Captain McFarlane reached the limit of his endurance. He ceased to struggle. His head lolled forward on his heaving chest. He slumped like an empty sack.

"That's better," muttered Mr. Boxley, as he picked him up and laid him back on the bunk as though he were a child. "Sleeping dogs are harmless dogs." He looked across the cabin at Burns. "Get up on the bridge and keep the watch until I get back. I'll be an hour or more."

He ordered me to fetch water and salves and with them he washed and dressed the wound. Meanwhile he questioned me about what had occurred and asked if I knew what had occasioned it. I told him all I had seen, and when I had finished, he pursed his lips and mused:

"The compass, eh? We'll soon fix that. There must be nothing in the cabin to rouse him from his sleep. Remember that, boy!"

Reaching up, he grasped the telltale compass and, with a superhuman wrench, tore it from its fastenings on the deck head and carried it with him out into the chart-room. After placing it in a drawer, he turned to me, studying my pinched face before he spoke.

"I would relieve you, boy, but there is no one whom I can trust to do the job as well as you. Do everything in your power to keep him quiet. His life depends on it. Sleep on the settee, or on the chair, but do not leave the cabin. Ring if you want anything. It won't be for long . . . not more than thirty hours. The course has been altered and we're headin' for Ferrol in Spain, on the far side o' the bay. We'll put him on shore there. The sea has no use for invalids. Good night, boy!"

"Good night, sir," I answered.

Thinking that he wasn't such a bad sort and feeling a little flattered by the trust which had been placed in me, I went back into the cabin, tucked the blankets around



Captain McFarlane and, after turning down the lights, sat down in the chair, laying my coat across my shoulders like a shawl.

Night became day and another night settled upon the sea. The soft wind whiffing through the cabin seemed to keep Captain McFarlane in a peaceful slumber from which he seldom came back to consciousness. When he did, I stood by the bunk and sang into his ear the old songs I had learned at my mother's knee. Perhaps in his tortured, vagrant mind they evoked memories by which he clung, through the dark hours, to life? Perhaps—and what a warmth of joy flooded through my heart when I thought of it—all pain left him and he felt only the soothing comfort of my crooning? He slept on, never moving; only the gentle heaving of his chest told me that he still lived. Counting the throbs of the engine, which was opened up to the limit, I sat in the chair and watched.

In a morning bright with sunshine they took him on shore. I stood at the top of the accommodation ladder and watched the launch proceed at full speed towards the shore.

"Boy!" barked Mr. Boxley behind me. "Pass the word to Mr. Selkirk to stand by the anchor. We've got to get under way immediately. Enough time has been lost already!"

The old second mate was sitting on a bollard outside his cabin door, smoking his pipe. I passed the word to him and then went to the wheel, for it was my watch on deck. Mr. Boxley gave me a sharp look, but the vessel was clear of the harbour and out in the Bay of Biscay before he came into the wheelhouse and said:

"I've sent down for a man to relieve you. Report to my cabin when he comes up."

He had moved into the captain's cabin upon the lower bridge by the time I left the wheel. He sat in the chair, his arms outstretched, his hands gripping the edge of the table, when I knocked on the door and entered timidly.

"How old are you, boy?" he asked.

"Sixteen, sir."



"A bit young. Hmm! A bit young." He chewed upon his tongue while he surveyed me through half-shut eyes. "Hmm! Young an' susceptible! You'll have to harden up. You'll have to forget the namby-pamby life you've been leadin. I'm a hard case, boy, hard as nails." He laughed harshly and went on: "I've cabled the owners that Captain McFarlane has been landed and that I've taken over his command. It'll be a long voyage an' Mr. Selkirk is a bit too old for double watches. I need a third mate. You'll take over the job. Mr. Burns will step up to second. But any nonsense an' back you go back to the half deck. D'you understand?"

I didn't . . . quite. But I answered eagerly: "Yes! Yes, sir!"

"Good! You can go below now and have a sleep. You've earned it. I'll keep the bridge. To-night you'll take the third mate's watch. Carry on!"

He waved me from the cabin. I wanted to thank him but the words strangled in my throat.

The third mate! I played with the thought as the clothing slipped to the deck of my cabin and I tumbled into the bunk. All the luck in the world seemed to be coming to me. When I wakened, I would be the third mate . . . as if a fairy had waved a magic wand over my head. The third mate!

I yawned wearily, pulled the curtains across the bunk to shut out the light, snuggled down under the blankets, and was soon fast asleep.

## CHAPTER VI

### MR. McNAB STIRS UP TROUBLE

AFTER dinner on the following day I took my palm and needle from a drawer and went up on to the bridge to repair the rents which the wind had made in the weather cloth at the height of the storm. The sun was out in a cloudless sky, and in fair, flattering weather the *Monarch*, a silvery sheen of dried salt from the spray on her superstructure, made her way to the southward with a white furl at her forefoot and a vitalizing throb to her engines. The chief engineer had been given orders, on the previous evening, to drive her all he could in an effort to make up the time which had been lost by entering port to put Captain McFarlane on shore.

When I was comfortably settled on a bench with the canvas tucked under my thigh and spread over my knees, Burns, who was on watch, left the log he was writing up in the wheelhouse and lounged on the windbreak close beside me.

"Doin' a field day, Tommy-boy?" he remarked.

"Yes," said I, straining to push the needle through the old and slightly damp canvas, "I thought I'd better get busy. There are quite a few little jobs to be done."

"That's the true sailorman spirit," said Burns. "A place for everything an' everything in its place." He swept the horizon with his eyes, then, lowering his voice a trifle, he went on: "Don't know just how we're goin' to fare now, though. The fat's over the fire an' ready to sizzle at any moment. It's the Chinese firemen. Old Boxley's puttin' the screws on. He knows they lost all their gear in Cardiff, an' he's raised the price of everything in the slop chest one hundred per cent!"

"But won't he give them clothes to replace those they lost down Tiger Bay?" I asked.

"An' lose a fat profit? Not him! He declared at the

breakfast-table that they'll pay his prices or freeze to death when in the vicinity of the Magellan Straits. The slop chest is the property of Captain McFarlane too. He'll be lucky if he gets paid back at cost. The Chinese, through Number One, protested to the chief steward this forenoon, but he just laughed in their faces an' told them to take their complaints to the devil. Which is no way to treat men, even with the law on your side. But he would say somethin' like that. He's a belly-crawlin' curmudgeon, pinchin' every penny he can find, who'll double-cross Boxley if he gets half a chance."

He looked aft at the wake, which was like a white snake following the vessel and, facing towards the wheel-house, rapped out: "Mind your steerin' in there! We're headin' for South America, not back to Cardiff! As the helmsman straightened to his course with a rattle of the steering chains, Burns looked back at me and asked: "How did things go last night, Tommy-boy? You'd be a bit scared, on watch alone for the first time."

"I never thought that it could be so dark, Bruce. Lights bobbed up everywhere. Not real lights. But I thought at first they were. You can imagine most anything if you think about it long enough. We should have been in collision a dozen times with a dozen vessels which came rushing right at us. I forgot all the Rules of the Road, and the harder I tried to remember them the farther they hid away in my mind. Luckily the vessels were imaginary. When a real one did come over the horizon, I had calmed down."

Burns laughed. "I was like that too, Tommy-boy," he admitted. "But I had this comfort. Captain McFarlane was close at my elbow for the first night or two. I bet you didn't see Old Boxley once?"

"You're wrong, Bruce. I saw him once. Shortly after eight bells he came up, grumbled about the cold, cursed everybody and everything, asked me what course was being steered, told me to send for him if I wasn't sure about anything, but advised me to be sure of everything, and in a blue fit stomped off back to his cabin."

"He was drinkin', then?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"He was drinkin' at midnight when I came up to relieve you. He's still at it. He's a fool, if ever there was one. Here he has a command. Somethin' he has worked an' waited for, an' it's sailin' away on a sea of alcohol. Gosh! It makes me wild."

"It's a pity, but he may come out of it. He's not such a bad chap. I hope he does."

"I don't think he will," Burns said ruefully, with a sad shake of his head. "You see, Tommy-boy, responsibility has given him a thirst. It does that to many fine men. They'll work like niggers under the eye of a superior, but when they get the step up, they're lost. I've seen a few in my years at sea. They just can't stand the gaff. Mebbe it's because they have so little to do; mebbe it's because they want to assume knowledge they don't possess. I don't know"

"I think I'll stick to water for a while," I said facetiously.

Burns gave me a quick, steady look. "You'd better," he blurted out, "or I'll knock you into the middle of next week."

"I was only joking," I protested, a little peeved. Fidgeting with my needle, I looked up at him from under my brows.

"It's nothin' to joke about," he snapped, and swung away across the bridge with his gaze fixed on the far horizon. For a second he stood in the starboard cab, so crestfallen that I was about to lay aside my work and go over to him, when, straightening his shoulders, he returned to his old position by the windbreak. Tolerance had taken the place of arrogance in his eyes. "I'm sorry, Tommy-boy," he said, quietly. "I didn't mean to go off the handle like that. But, for a minute, I saw red. We had a lot of trouble in my home over drinkin'."

He said no more. He swung his legs over the rails and sat on the top bar. I resumed my sewing with an abstracted diligence.

Suddenly he leaped down from the rail and gazed down on the lower deck. "Here's Number One comin'



on to the bridge. I wonder what he wants. I'd better waylay him before he wakes Old Boxley from his beauty sleep."

He walked quickly across the bridge to the port ladder and descended to the lower bridge. Number One, a towel wrapped around his head like a shawl and held tightly under his chin to keep the sting of the cold wind from his yellow skin, came up from the deck below and halted before Burns as I rose to my feet and looked down over the rail.

"What you wantee?" Burns asked, very affably.

"Me chatchee, speakee captin," stated Number One, huddling up within his singlet and shifting nervously from one foot to the other.

"Captain plentee bye-bye," said Burns, illustrating the state of sleep with pantomimic gestures. "You no can see him. Suppose you come four bells dogwatch. Plentee talkee. Mebbe catchee plentee hell."

An apprehensive look wrinkled Number One's face, but he shook his head stubbornly. "Speakee captin now," he said. "No speakee, filemen say no work."

"So! That's it, eh?" thundered a voice.

Burns spun like a top on his heels. Number One seemed to shrivel up under his skin, like a mummy. Captain Boxley's head, bloated with sleep, appeared in a porthole, the eyes blazing with wrath, and then, heralded by grunts and curses, he stood framed in the doorway of his cabin. Over his pyjamas he had pulled a pair of blue uniform trousers. His chest was bare, except for the matted black hair. On his head, slightly askew, was a deep-sea cap from under which his grey locks protruded like tufts of grass. He seemed an enraged Nero standing there, glowering to right and left with the sunlight blinding his eyes. Slowly his head thrust forward on his short bull neck as his gaze settled on Number One.

"What d'you want?" he bellowed, and he spat from between tight lips.

Clap-clap went the wooden slippers as Number One shuffled forward. His face was ashen and his lips were blue. The hand clutching the towel shook, revealing

only too clearly his timidity. He halted before Captain Boxley, fumbling for words.

"Dumb, eh?" shouted Captain Boxley derisively. "What's the matter with you? I have stolen your tongue, eh? Cooked it for my dinner? Speak! Out with it before I kick you from the bridge!"

Number One mustered all his courage. He fastened his gaze on the captain's face.

"The thlee engineer make plentee touble. Allee time speak plentee 'quick, quick'. When filemen no can do, thlee engineer make fight. Filemen speak kill him . . . so!" He drew a hand across his throat.

Captain Boxley struck an attitude of drunken interest. "So that's it, eh," he mused, closing one eye very deliberately. "We're goin' to have a little mutiny on our hands. Tut!" He turned to Burns and asked: "Who's the third engineer?"

"A Scot, sir, by name of McNab."

"Send for him!"

Burns looked at me and nodded towards the wheelhouse. I understood and went into the wheelhouse and blew down the speaking-tube to the engine-room, passing the order on to the man who answered me.

James Anderson McNab, clothed only in a thin pair of trousers and a singlet, came on to the bridge, wiping the grease from his hands on a sweat rag. On catching sight of Number One standing before the captain, he paused in his stride as if to control the anger that seethed within him. When he walked forward again, he had the look of a martyr.

"Ye'll be wantin' me, sirr?" he asked respectfully, deferentially bowing his head ever so slightly.

Captain Boxley was in fine fettle. He cleared his throat with great gusto. His hands came together with a loud bang.

"Yes, I want you, Mister," he shouted, smothering the words with venom. "I want you to hear what this man has to say against you." He shifted his gaze to Number One. "Have your say now," he thundered. "Face to face, that's my way o' it. Fair play an' favours to none."

Number One moved back a step or two, the better to

see Mr. McNab. He repeated the accusation he had made, falteringly but resolutely.

"Ye puddin'-faced mongrel!" yelled Mr. McNab. He clenched his hand and leaped forward. Quick as a wink, Burns blocked his way, knocking him against the deck house with a heave of his shoulder. Sliding down the handrails of the ladder, I swung over beside Number One, who was cringing, frightened, by the forward wind-break.

"Oh! Ho! A pretty kettle o' fish!" shouted Captain Boxley, eyeing us each in turn. He missed nothing. "It seems to me," he went on, "that the yellow peril has the support of the multitude." He drew open his lips with a loud "blah" and settled his gaze on Mr. McNab, who was belligerently approaching Burns. "Just a minute, Mister," he said. "Suppose you give me your side of the story."

Mr. McNab seemed to realize where he was. With an effort he brought his anger under control and faced the captain.

"They're trash, lazy, good-for-nothin' trash!" he blurted out, jerking a finger towards Number One. "Ye're orders are for steam, sirr. Steam tae push the ship along. They canna keep it up! They're lazy, slow coaches, sirr. But I'll mak' them toe the mark. They'll raise steam tae mak' time, sirr, or ma name's no James Anderson McNab!"

Captain Boxley chuckled coarsely. There was a rasp in his voice when he spoke. "So! That's it? Eh, Mr. McNab?" He stroked his chin reflectively and, after a few moments, went on, speaking very deliberately so that his words could be heard all over the bridge: "I thank you, Mister. I thought they might be workin' against me. Well, we'll see what we'll see. You have my permission to sweat the guts out o' them. Steam must be kept up! Eh, Mr. McNab?"

"Aye, sirr, it has that," agreed Mr. McNab, "an' I'll keep it up. They'll girn but they work!" He shot a malignant glare at Number One and turned to leave the bridge.

Quickly I stepped before Captain Boxley. "But, sir,"

I began . . . I wanted to tell him that Mr. McNab had a grudge against the Chinese firemen.

"Enough!" he barked, silencing me with a snap of his fingers. "Who's running this vessel? D'you think because I made you third mate that you can interfere in my affairs? Get up on the bridge where you belong an' mind your own business." He stepped back into the cabin and banged the door in my face.

I looked around at Burns. Raising his eyebrows, he shook his head and motioned towards the upper bridge with his right hand. Number One and Mr. McNab had disappeared. There was nothing more that we could do.

"It's a pretty kettle o' fish, all right," Burns remarked, as he lounged again on the windbreak.

I thought it was too, but I said nothing. The attitude of Captain Boxley was beyond my comprehension. I took up my palm and needle and went on with my work.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE SAILORMEN SERENADE

“SORR ! Can I be after speakin’ to ye, sorr ?”

About to enter my cabin after dinner, I swung around to see Pat Greenaway slouching towards me with a troubled look on his wind-tanned face. A month had passed since leaving Ferrol and the *Monarch* was in the vicinity of the Magellan Straits, heading into a brisk, cold wind and digging her bluff into a short, nasty sea.

“You can, Bos’n,” I answered, “if you’ll come in out of the wind. It’s cold as charity out here.”

Within the cabin it was warm, with the steam hissing through the radiator. He loosened the buttons of his oilskin coat and sat down on the edge of the settee. I gave him permission to light his pipe. He drew it from his pocket, and when it was lighted and smoking like a furnace, I asked him to tell me what was on his mind.

He thought for a moment, then began : “It’s loike this, sorr. Bein’ it’s Christmas the morn, the mate, bless his ould heart, has promised the men a holiday which, I might say, is no more than their due. The trouble is, sorr, that I was after hearin’ from the cook, who heard it from the chief steward himself, that the Ould Man has given orders that no grog shall be issued to the crew. Sure, sorr, an’ it’s pairfectly sacrileegous ! Christmas without a tot o’ rum is loike a Friday without pea soup. It’s an occasion, sorr, for mutiny !”

I would have laughed but he was too serious. It was a condition he could not understand. It was the custom, on all vessels, to give all hands a glass of rum on Christmas Day. It was the only gift they received. To withhold it was nothing more or less than an iniquity. Yet it was to be expected. Captain Boxley had been drinking to such an excess that probably there was very little rum on board and a new stock could not be procured until an

arrival at Punta Arenas, where the vessel was bound for orders. Possibly the boatswain knew this and, like all hard-bitten men, was a bit envious. The mention of mutiny told me, only too plainly, the attitude of the men in the forecastle.

"You'd never lead the men in mutiny, Bos'n, over a glass of rum you've never had," I said, with a laugh. "It would be as ridiculous as fighting your own shadow, and anyway, mutiny is a very serious offence. You can be hanged for it."

"Sure, an' that's true, sorr," he admitted, "but the devil himself is gettin' in the men an' they're growlin' loike washerwomen at a fair. It wouldn't be bad at all if he had a koind heart, treatin' the men fair an' square, but it's black as the hobs of hell an' hard as granite."

It was truth that he spoke. Captain Boxley was bullying the men. In addition to being watch and watch, they had to work a field day, which meant that they were on deck fourteen hours out of the twenty-four. Slaves had a much easier time. It would never do, I realized, to let the boatswain get an inkling of my thoughts. Discipline had to be maintained.

"I would forget about the rum if I were you, Bos'n," I advised. "What's one glass, anyway? The voyage may be short and you'll then be able to buy all you want."

"It's not that, sorr," he asserted. "It's the principle. Haven't we got rights?"

"You have," I admitted, "but I can't see how you can get them."

"Ye couldn't be after tellin' us how to soften his black heart, sorr?" he asked, leaning over towards me. "Sure, an' it's Christmas, sorr."

I thought deeply. It was a ticklish problem, but a solution might lead the men away from the idea of mutiny.

"M' ould woman'll be out singin' the carols on the Antrim Road, sorr. Happy they are, sorr . . . only sailors are sad."

That might do it! "Look here, Bos'n," I cried enthusiastically. "Why not serenade him? Take him by surprise at midnight."

"D'ye mean sing to him, sorr?"

"Yes, Bos'n. On the stroke of eight bells. When Christmas is coming over the horizon."

"All hands, sorr?"

"Yes! On the bridge. He would be so surprised and happy, he'd give you anything."

"Sure an' he moight, sorr, at that." He rose from the settee and buttoned the oilskin coat around him. He opened the door and stepped over the sill. Hope lighted his eyes as he faced me and said: "I'll be goin' along to the men, sorr. Thank ye kindly . . . kindly, sorr."

I opened my lips to say: "I wish you luck", but he was gone.

The night came in blustering and wet with the spray driving across the lurching vessel in a drenching stream. In oilskins and sea boots I sheltered behind the weather cloth, my eyes peering into the murk, while my thoughts flew through space to the homeland which seemed to move farther and farther away. It puzzled me at first, this movement, until I realized, with a bit of a shock, that I was happy to be where I was, alone on the bridge in the rain. Christmas had brought me a measure of contentment. I thought of it as a gift. When I told Burns about it, later in the day, he laughed and said that it was the sea getting into my blood. I was happy; that was enough.

When eight bells at midnight struck, I saw, by the aid of the dim light that came from the partly screened ports of the chart-room, the sailormen gather together on the bridge deck. It was the change of the watch with all hands on deck. Burns, who was relieving me, came over into the lee wing of the upper bridge.

"What are the men up to, Tommy-boy?" he asked, shivering a little with the cold.

"They're having a party to celebrate Christmas," I answered.

"Jove! It is Christmas, isn't it?" He slapped me on the back and shouted: "A Merry Christmas, Tommy-boy. Many of them!"



"Same to you, Bruce." We shook hands and, as we moved towards the after rail, linked our arms and looked down below.

The sailormen came on to the lower bridge where the captain's quarters were. Some were in oilskins, others huddled into old coats and jerseys. The wind was now piping in the full tumult of the gale, but they paid no heed as they gathered around the door and began to sing an old sea song. It wavered and died away ! They looked around at each other ; then one man bolder than his mates went over and knocked loudly on the door with his knuckles.

A light flickered within the cabin ! There was an almost imperceptible movement among the sailormen towards the ladder that led down to the bridge deck. There would have been a stampede had not the door swung back on its hinges to reveal Captain Boxley standing in his pyjamas on the mat.

The boatswain gave a signal.

"A Merry Christmas, sir !" the sailormen cried.

"Merry Christmas, men, an' many of them !" Captain Boxley answered, and he turned as if to close the door. A dollop of spray had come swirling over the bridge.

The boatswain raised his voice and the sailormen took up the air and joined him as he sang :

"Oh ! Captain ! Sir ! It's Christmas Eve !

Whiskey ! Johnny !

Oh ! Captain ! Sir ! It's Christmas Eve !

Whiskey for my Johnny !"

Captain Boxley halted, swung open the door again, and by the flickering light of the bulkhead lamp I thought I saw the makings of a smile come over his face. He held up his hand for silence.

"All right, men," he said quietly. "I was almost forgetting !"

He turned and went into his cabin. The bell summoning the chief steward rang shrilly from the region of the saloon. The sailormen nudged each other ; some smacked their lips ; some slapped their thighs. Burns



whispered in my ear: "The old boy's openin' up his heart!"

The chief steward's shadow fell across the deck. It disappeared and the clap-clap of his slippers came from the companionway. Soon after he returned, Captain Boxley appeared at the door.

"Here, Bos'n!" he said. The boatswain walked forward. Captain Boxley went on: "Here is some lime juice . . . whack it out among the men. A Merry Christmas to you all!"

The door slammed shut, the light was doused within the cabin, and Captain Boxley returned to his bunk. The sailormen stood dumbfounded; someone swore, which relieved the tension; the demijohn of lime juice went flying through the murk into the sea to leeward.

"Oly smoke!" a sailorman exclaimed.

The boatswain raised his voice:

"The Old Man sure is a son of a gu-un,  
Blow, b-hoys, blow!  
He's gone an' drunk up all the ru-um,  
Blow, b-hoys, bully b-hoys, blow!"

The sailormen laughed and singing: "Blow, boys, blow", at the top of their voices, left the lower bridge and went along to the forecastle. Again the vessel was quiet except for the wild ravings of the gale.

"He certainly has the Christmas spirit," said Burns, peering through the window of the cab.

"I'm glad the sailormen took it the way they did," said I.

"Sailormen are all right, Tommy-boy. Sea dogs are much the same as land dogs. They become philosophical with lyin' in the sun. But you'd better nip down an' turn in. The mornin' will be on you before you know it. Good night!"

I went along to my cabin, wondering what would have happened if the men had decided on mutiny!

## CHAPTER VIII

### CAPTAIN BOXLEY IS SUPERSEDED

CHRISTMAS DAY broke grey and dull, and although it was summer in the Southern Hemisphere, there was a rawness in the air that suggested winter. From my bunk, where I snuggled for warmth in the well-worn blankets, I could see the mountains through the open port. The clouds rested heavily on their dark summits, promising rain. Shivering, I curled up like a ball, buried my head in the pillow, and tried to sleep.

Immediately one bell struck on the bridge. Footsteps sounded on the deck, a knock came at the door, and a sailorman entered the cabin, drawing aside the curtain with a brisk tinkle of the brass rings.

"Rise an' shine, sir," he said.

He lowered and screwed down the port, turned on the heater and, in time to the crackling of the steam in the pipes, rattled the lid of the washbasin.

"Are ye awake, sir?" he asked, standing close to the bunk.

Twisting around slightly, I showed him an open eye, which I immediately closed again.

"Ye'd better show a leg, sir," he encouraged. "Ye'll have to get muffled up. Cold an' nippy out. Reg'lar Straits o' Magellan weather. The Old Man's on the bridge, too, all dressed up like a peacock."

I rose on to my elbow. "How do the men feel about last night?" I asked.

The sailorman looked at me with quiet candour. "It's all in life, sir. They don't mind, now that it's past. But he'll get paid out. Ye get no more than ye give, sir. Things have a way o' evenin' up. Just watch an' see."

"The sailormen won't cause any trouble?"

"No, sir! Not them! But he's rubbed the Chinks the wrong way until they're jabberin' like a lot o' wild

Indians. Ye never can tell how they'll act. If we had to growl at the same time, it would be *boom*," he snapped his fingers in the air, "an' the whole ship would be fightin' to the death. No, sir! We're white, though he doesn't seem to know it, an' we're keepin' an eye on things." He glanced towards the clock on the desk. "But ye'd better get up, sir. Ye've got ten minutes to go."

He left the cabin. I stretched out luxuriously on the bunk with my eyes on the clock and my thoughts on the sailormen. If the Chinese firemen did mutiny, and it seemed to me that they had every justification, for Mr. McNab was carrying out Captain Boxley's instructions with iron fists, it would be much easier to handle the situation with the sailormen on our side. I wondered if I should buy a revolver at the first port of call or rely on a belaying pin for protection. I decided on the belaying pin.

At five minutes to eight I threw my legs over the bunk board and dropped to the floor. Dousing my face in a basin of cold water, I wiped it dry quickly and, taking my new uniform from the wardrobe, donned it in honour of the day.

Eight bells struck as I left the cabin. The sea was flat calm and dirty brown like a river.

On the starboard side, near the fiddle, the watch on deck were rigging the accommodation ladder under the watchful eye of the boatswain. I ascended the ladder to the bridge.

Mr. Selkirk, red in the face with the cold, gave me the course and, inclining his head ever so slightly in the direction of the port cab, went down into the chart-room to write up the log before going to his cabin.

I walked on to the centre of the bridge. Captain Boxley stood in the port cab, gazing off towards the land, where the tide raced over the rocks in a welter of foam. On the sleeves of his jacket were sewn four brand-new gold bands, the insignia of his rank. He must have found them in the cabin. I wondered if they gave him a sense of command, as the sight of them did to me. I moved over beside him.



"A Merry Christmas, sir," I said.

His eyes glared fiercely. "Merry Christmas be—" he began in a voice like thunder; then, with an effort, he calmed down and went on, "Merry Christmas, boy!" Something amused him. He chuckled to himself. He looked me up and down until I felt uncomfortable under his scrutiny. He slapped his hairy hands with great gusto. "It'll be a Merry Christmas, boy," he said, "to-night . . . when we're in port. Good luck's been shipmates with me. The delay has been more than made up. The chief'll say it's the engines but I'll tell you it's the good navigation that's done it. There's a bit o' time to spare. If the orders are at Punta Arenas to-night, we'll lie over in port until the mornin'. It'll give me a chance to celebrate . . . not Christmas but these." He nodded towards the bands on his arm. "I've got to wet them, boy. It's not every day a man is made a captain!"

"I wish you the best of luck, sir," I stammered.

"I've got it, boy!" he shouted, expanding his chest until I thought the buttons would burst from his jacket and fly overboard. "Look at the weather! It's holdin' fine. Look at the ship! She steppin' along like a champion. I tell you, boy, luck's with me!" He strutted across to the centre of the bridge, halted with his back to the wheelhouse and took a rough bearing of the land on the bow. "Get me a bearing of that," he nodded to port, "an' that," he nodded to starboard, "an' I'll fix her on the chart."

I climbed up on to "monkey island" and took the bearing by the standard compass.

The sun had set, but a soft, pale-green twilight tinged the smooth water when the *Monarch* came to an anchor in Punta Arenas Roads. Between her and the town, which nestled at the foot of a gloomy mountain, lay five hulks, one astern of the other, all laden with coal. Many vessels, making the passage of the Straits, called in to replenish their bunkers and to take on water for domestic use.

Darkness and an unwonted tranquillity had settled



over the *Monarch*, when the steward came from the saloon alleyway and rang the dinner bell. Because it was Christmas, the dinner had been held back until the vessel was safely moored, Captain Boxley declaring that he would dine in peace.

I was washing up in my cabin when the door opened and Mr. Selkirk came in.

"Ye'll wait for the second table," he said, "just as though the vessel was at sea. It's the customary procedure in ports such as these, wi' a' the thievin' scoundrels that are about. Stand by near the bridge an' keep an eye cocked on the gangway. Dinna let onybody come aboard unless they look like they were somebody."

"Very good, sir," I answered, unable to conceal my disappointment.

"Dinna fash yersel'. Ye're no missin' muckle. I'll see that they leave a wee bit o' the plum duff an' mebbe a raisin or two. Ye'll no be carin' about the whisky."

He backed through the doorway and walked off along the deck, muttering to himself. I pulled on my greatcoat again and went on duty. Approaching the cross-bunker hatch I heard a cough and, looking up, I saw the dark bulk of Captain Boxley on the lower bridge.

"Is that you, Mister?" he called out.

"Yes, sir," I answered.

He went on: "I've ordered a boat to be sent off within the hour to take me on shore. Hold it alongside until I come on deck. I don't want to be disturbed at dinner."

"Very good, sir."

For a moment he was silhouetted in the light from his cabin; then the door banged shut. I moved over to the bulwarks and leaned on the rail. A hurricane lantern hung at the bottom of the accommodation ladder, another at the top. The light spread in a small circle over the water, making the darkness beyond more profound. I wondered if boats with muffled oars were approaching laden with thieves. I wondered what I would do if they appeared. But time passed and nothing happened. I took a turn along the deck. The bell struck the hour with a silvery note. A sailorman loomed out of the darkness and

reported: "Anchor lights are burning bright, sir!" I answered him and he passed on. He would be handy near the galley, listening for my summons. I sat down on the hatch, thinking about Christmas.

Suddenly I was alert! The chuck-chuck of oars in rowlocks sounded alarmingly near. I listened intently, then almost leaped to the bulwark rail and looked over. A boat, rowed by four men, was approaching! It came into the circle of light and gently manœuvred alongside the lower platform of the accommodation ladder. It was a large boat, heavily built. In the bow, huddled together, were a number of sheep and, in addition to the four oarsmen, two men sat in the stern sheets, their faces shadowed by their hats.

"Ahoy there! On deck!" one of them hailed.

I looked over my shoulder. The sailorman was approaching from the direction of the galley. I leaned over the bulwark rail.

"What do you want?" I shouted.

"Is the captain about?" a voice shouted back.

"No! He's at dinner."

"Tell him I want him right away!"

"Sorry, sir, but you'll have to wait. He doesn't want to be disturbed until he's finished. He shouldn't be long now. He's going on shore and he'll be out soon."

The two men in the stern sheets looked at each other and laughed. The man who had not spoken issued an order in a strange tongue and the boatmen shipped their oars and made the boat fast to the guess-warp. The other stood up and said: "We'll go up on deck and wait for him."

They stepped on to the lower platform and came up the ladder, conversing in undertones. I whispered to the sailorman to call the watch on deck and then went forward to meet them at the upper platform.

"Who are you?" the first man demanded to know before I could speak.

"The third mate, sir," I answered, straightening up to gain the utmost from my five feet five inches.

"A bit young, aren't you?" he said, greatly amused, and raising his eyebrows superciliously.

A retort sprang to my lips but I curbed it, for he possessed an air of authority that was disconcerting.

"You can wait here for the captain," I said, with finality.

"Thank you," he said pleasantly enough, and laughed again.

He took a short turn along the deck. I followed him with my gaze, nonplussed by his polite effrontery. He was slenderly but powerfully built, with broad shoulders, apparently in his early forties, and his clean-shaven face was bronzed by the sun. His eyes, which were cold and hard blue like a glacier, had a penetrating strength that seemed to take in everything. What he saw must have satisfied him, for he approached his companion, who had remained by the upper platform of the accommodation ladder, and said:

"She looks all right, doesn't she?"

"Better than the other old wagon."

"Much!"

The man on the platform took out his watch and held it near the hurricane lantern. He replaced it in his pocket and said:

"I wonder how long he's going to be. I want to get on shore. The old lady's holding back the dinner for me."

"We'll give him a few more minutes," said the other. "Meanwhile we might as well get the sheep on board." He turned to me and asked: "Would you please have your men bring the sheep up?" He raised a hand as I was about to protest. "It's quite all right. They're to be used on the coast as fresh meat. None can be procured at Antofagasta, where the vessel's bound."

"But perhaps Captain Boxley doesn't want them," I protested, weakly, I'll admit.

"You needn't worry about that. He'll have to take them. Mr. Harvey," he nodded towards the man on the upper platform, "is the vessel's agent. He has received instructions by cable from the owners to put them



on board. You'd better attend to them right away."

His request was in the nature of a command. I summoned the sailormen who had gathered around the fiddley entrance and ordered them to work. The sheep, baa-baa-ing and kicking like fury, were carried up the accommodation ladder one at a time and set down on the deck where, scared by their strange environment, they fought with each other for the darkest corner around the bunker winch. The commotion drew a bellow from the upper bridge.

"Stop that noise there! What d'you think this is? Carnival Day?"

I came from beneath the overhand of the deck house as Captain Boxley loomed up through the darkness on the bridge. At the ladder he stood stock-still and, with one foot on the upper step, glared around. He was intoxicated and breathed noisily.

"What's all this, boy?" he thundered, catching sight of me.

"There . . . there are two men to see you, sir," I answered.

"Men!" he roared. He stumbled down the ladder and advanced towards me, his gorilla-like arms crooked as though to grasp and crush me. I backed away. He halted, glaring in the direction of the bunker winch. "What's the joke, boy?" he bellowed. "D'you call these men?" He shook a finger towards the sheep.

"No . . . no . . . sir," I stammered, backing farther away. "The men are over there!" I pointed towards the upper platform of the accommodation ladder.

He swayed on his feet like a tree in the wind and, lurching around, followed the direction of my finger. He settled the felt hat on his head, buttoning his shore-going overcoat across his chest, and with a belligerent, inebriated grunt, took a step forward as the two men advanced to meet him.

"How d'you do, Mr. Boxley?" said the well-built stranger, extending his right hand.

"Who are you? What d'you want on board my



vessel?" demanded Captain Boxley, glowering from one to the other.

The stranger laughed quietly. I thought of a cat playing with a mouse. "I'm Walker, from the *Emperor*," he said. "I received a cable from Glasgow when she was in here for bunkers a few days ago. I was ordered to wait behind. I have to take over your command. Mr. Harvey, our agent, has confirmation."

Mr. Harvey stepped into the circle of light, drawing some papers from his pocket. Captain Boxley waved him away with a violent gesture of his left arm. Bent slightly forward, he was like an enraged bull, wounded to the point of death. I backed among the sailormen, fearful of what might take place.

Captain Walker said suavely: "I'm sorry, Boxley, but orders are orders. Your turn will come again. The mate of the *Emperor* was senior to you. It wouldn't be quite right to put you in command ahead of him. You'll understand, I know."

Mr. Boxley nodded his head as he straightened up. He looked the other square in the eye.

"I am at your orders, sir," he said.

"Good!" said Captain Walker. "If you will come into the cabin, we'll change over the papers. I want to sail as soon as possible."

They went into the saloon. The sailormen chuckled. One of them whispered: "He had it comin' to him, he did!" I ran around the deck. Burns was in his cabin, undressing to turn into his bunk. I burst in upon him.

"We've got a new captain," I cried.

"A what?"

"A new captain. He's just come on board. Boxley's in a terrible stew. Name's Walker and he has a face as straight as a poker."

"Walker?" Burns thought for a minute. "That must be Hymn-book Walker from the *Emperor*. He has the reputation of bein' a fine skipper. A bit strict but . . . not so bad."

"Mebbe he'll be able to keep Old Boxley in his place," said I.

"Old Boxley won't be the only one to be put in his place, Tommy-boy," Burns said, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Do you realize that you'll have to go back into the half deck?"

A shadow fell over me.

"Gosh, Bruce! I hadn't thought of that!"

## CHAPTER IX

### I GO TO GAOL

“SOMETHING will have to be done ! That’s all about it !” I shouted vehemently. “They can’t work us to death just because we’re apprentices. They must give us some time off. Can’t you chaps think of a scheme ?”

Spifkins looked at Ernie and Ernie scratched his head. They were both sitting on the floor of the starboard half deck, too dirty with coal dust to sit on the bunks. I was on the settee, the place of honour, and exciting them to mutiny.

Three weeks had elapsed since the departure of the *Monarch* from Punta Arenas and most of the time she had lain to an anchor off Antofagasta, discharging coal from all hatches. Captain Walker had turned out to be a martinet and, to save expenses and thereby make a name for himself, he had ordered the crew to work the cargo from one hatch. From six in the morning until sundown we laboured in a fog of coal dust, shovelling the heavy lumps of coal into iron buckets, heaving them up with the winches, and dumping them into a lighter that was made fast alongside. Burns was hatchman ; Spifkins and Ernie drove the winches ; I attended to the bucket in the hold while the sailormen filled it ; Mr. Boxley cursed our souls to hell and back again. After the first day a protest had been made, all hands mustering on the lower bridge after supper. Captain Walker had come from his cabin, smoking a large cigar and with a sarcastic smirk on his face. He listened patiently ; then, reaching for the Articles of Agreement, read from the first page, the words coming from his lips like shots from a gun : “The crew shall work cargo if required.” He threw back his head and looked down on us all. “You have agreed to do it,” he said. “You haven’t a leg to stand on. That will do !” He blew a cloud of smoke from his mouth and, with a

disdainful shrug of his broad shoulders, walked through us as though we weren't there and began to pace up and down the bridge. We looked at each other miserably and then drifted back to our quarters. There was nothing else that we could do. We had signed the Agreement and we must obey.

For ten days all had gone well; then, after a week of back-breaking toil, Mr. Boxley passed word around that the discharging would be continued through Sunday. A cargo of nitrate had been closed and it was in lighters, waiting to be loaded. The *Monarch* holds had to be emptied, swept out, and washed down immediately. Any argument and he would keep all hands working, night and day, until the flesh ran off their bones as sweat!

"Can't you chaps think of a scheme?" I shouted again. "I'm a little stale with living in the saloon so long. I've lost the perspective of the half deck."

"We could encourage the sailormen to refuse duty," Spifkins suggested. "They're about ready for anything."

"That wouldn't help us very much," said I. "The Old Man has the upper hand and he knows it. He'd drive them to work; fine them for refusing to obey; and after we reached England, clap them in gaol for mutiny."

"I've got it!" Ernie exclaimed, rising to his feet with eagerness.

"Out with it!" I cried. "Come on! Don't keep us waiting!"

He laughed at his thoughts. "Why don't *we* go to gaol?" he asked. "It would be like a holiday. We could have a change of food . . . a change of scenery. McCarthy was in for drunkenness last week-end and he said it wasn't so bad. Perhaps they'd appreciate us more when we came back, too."

The idea seemed perfectly sound to me. Saturday night could be spent in gaol and on Sunday, after the captain had paid our fines, it would be too late to work cargo on the *Monarch*.

"Gosh! But your brain's working, Ernie," I said, slapping him on the back. "What do you think about it, Spifkins?"



"I . . . I'm not so sure but . . . but if you think it's all right . . . I . . . I'm willing to go with you. I . . . d—don't know what my mother would think."

"She won't know anything about it," I assured him. "And anyway, even if she did, you won't be in gaol for murder or any little thing like that. It will be for a *cause* ! Think of that !"

"I . . . I am thinking."

"Then you'll join us ?"

He nodded reluctantly. "I . . . yes," he said.

Joining hands with Ernie, we passed them over his head, and as we danced around him, we sang :

"Off to prison we must go, we must go ! We must go !  
Off to prison we must go,  
Old man Friday !"

A sweet-smelling dusk lay gently over the town when we landed from a small rowboat at the mole and, after paying the villainous-looking ferryman, strolled arm in arm up the main street, singing lustily to attract the attention of the police. Our efforts were unsuccessful. We played "follow-the-leader", darting in and out of doorways, vaulting over low walls into gardens, shrieking like wild Indians, until, for want of breath, we were forced to rest on a seat in the plaza.

"It's no use," I said disconsolately, mopping the perspiration from my brow. "The gaol must be for criminals. We'll have to commit a murder or get drunk. I don't know which would be the easier."

"I . . . I think we should go back to the ship," suggested Spifkins. "I don't like it here. Th . . . those Chileans don't seem very nice. The third mate told me they all carry daggers . . . l—long thin ones."

"To tickle your innards ! Eh, Spifkins ?" said I, digging him in the ribs with a finger.

He moved away, peering into the darkness. Ernie leaned towards me.

"Let's make one last effort," he said. "We can't admit that we're beaten. Why don't we bribe our way in ? That should be easy !"

We pooled our money. In all we had two pesos and thirty-five centavos.

"You take it," said Ernie to me, "and if you get in, we'll all follow you."

The gaol was on the far side of the plaza. Boldly we marched up to the door. A soldier in a bedraggled blue uniform many sizes too large and armed to the teeth with a sword, a pistol, and a rifle on which a bayonet was fixed, rose from a bench and blocked our way.

"We want to go in," said I, offering the money, and when he shook his head, I shouted, "In! In!"

He shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of futility, conveying very obviously that he did not understand what we wanted.

"He doesn't understand English," I said, facing Spifkins and Ernie. "I don't know what we're going to do."

"I do!" shouted Ernie, and quick as a wink he punched the soldier on the nose!

The soldier yelled, staggered back, clutched at the air, and fell to the ground. Men poured from the gaol, and in a second we were surrounded and dragged before an officer who sat behind a desk in a whitewashed room. We wrote our names in a large book while he fingered our brass buttons and asked innumerable questions which we could not understand. He seemed reluctant to detain us. The angry mutterings of his men, I believe, decided him. He gave an order. We were led through a narrow passage and pushed through a door that was banged behind us. I stumbled over someone lying on the floor, bringing a volley of profanity upon my head.

"I'm sorry," I said, feeling that even in gaol I must be polite.

The night dragged on interminably as we lay together in a corner, afraid to speak, hardly daring to breathe. The stench was awful, making the air heavy as lead. Spifkins wept. Ernie slept. I sat with an arm around each of them, endeavouring to understand the madness that had guided us into such a place.

Daylight came at last, filtering through two grilles high up on opposite walls. The cell was forty feet long

and about thirty wide. It was bare as a garret, except for a pair of stocks which were, at the moment, without an occupant. The floor was of tile and covered with filth. A few steps led up to the wooden door. We had seven companions, all natives.

It was nine o'clock when Captain Walker, dressed in a spotless white uniform, appeared with an officer of the guard in the doorway. His ice-blue eyes searched the gloomy interior and, for a few brief moments, rested on us. He conversed in a low tone with the officer, who nodded his head from time to time; then, without a word to us, he departed. The door banged shut. The iron bolts shot into place.

"H—he can't be going to leave us here?" breathed Spifkins.

"No, he couldn't do that," I told him. "He needs us to work the cargo and the vessel."

But as the hours passed and he did not return, my assurance was shaken and I became possessed of a terrible fear. What if Ernie had killed the soldier? In falling, his head may have struck a stone! Would the law, in that case, demand the death penalty? The perspiration dampened my brow! Surely Captain Walker would not leave us to our fate without an effort to save us? I thought, in those dark moments, that he would!

Each hour was a nightmare. We lay with our eyes closed most of the time, pretending to be asleep. We received neither food nor water. A fellow prisoner explained with exaggerated emphasis that unless we had friends, we starved. He offered to share his beans and rice, but our innards were wobbly and we refused his kindness, which almost started a fight.

Daylight waned and the gloom within the cell became a menacing darkness. Bats darted about with a sinister swishing. A rat pit-patted across the concrete floor. Our fellow prisoners grunted and settled down for the night. We crept closer together, for comfort and for warmth.

"Let's sing," I suggested, when the stillness squeezed like a vice upon my thoughts. "They can only punish us by throwing us out of gaol."





THE SOLDIER YELLED, STAGGERED BACK AND  
CLUTCHED THE AIR.





I felt Spifkins and Ernie nodding in the darkness. Their hands groped into mine.

"Just think of it!" I advised them, putting all the cheer I could muster into my voice. "Here we are with no watches to keep, no coal to shovel, no place to go, and we're as miserable as can be. I bet you both a million pounds that all hands are wishing they were in our places!"

"D—do you really t—think so?" asked Spifkins.

"Sure! Every man jack of them. Let's sing just to show those spigotties that we don't care a hoot about their dirty old gaol."

We sang, notwithstanding the curses that were flung at us, until, one by one, we slumped over on the floor to fall asleep from sheer exhaustion.

From a bad dream, in which I stood alone beneath a gallows with a noose around my neck, I wakened to blink into the glare of a lantern. White-trousered legs towered over my head.

"Don't make any noise, Tommy-boy," I heard Burns say, with a wild leaping of my heart. "Wake up the others an' follow me. Quiet's the word!"

Gently shaking Spifkins and Ernie, I cautioned them to be still while I whispered the news. Rising to our feet and picking our way over the recumbent figures on the floor, we followed in the wake of the lantern. I sighed with relief when the door of the cell closed behind us and quickened my pace as we traversed the corridor. At the entrance of the gaol Burns placed some money in the hand of the officer of the guard, who was enveloped in a long black cloak and, bidding us follow him, he set off down the deserted street at the double.

At the mole, rising and falling to the swell, was the *Monarch's* gig with two sailormen at the oars.

"Hop in!" ordered Burns. We did with alacrity. He sat in the stern sheets, took the tiller. "Give way! Smart's the word!" he said. The gig sped out into the night. It was more than halfway towards the *Monarch* before he spoke again.

"You've made a pretty mess of things, Tommy-boy," he said. "The Old Man is as mad as a hatter an' he has

every reason to be. He's had to bribe the commandante an' the officer of the guard to obtain your release, an' it's gone against his grain. He just had to do it, though. They were goin' to send you up into the mines or some such place. Gosh! But you're lucky to be here. But I'll say no more. You'll hear enough from him. He wants to see you all as soon as you get on board."

Fifteen minutes later we stood on the lower bridge, waiting for Captain Walker to open the door of his cabin. That he was aware that we were outside, I knew, for soon after I had knocked, he had risen from his bunk and lighted the bulkhead lamp. When he appeared, he was in uniform.

"Ah! You're back!" he exclaimed, as though surprised to see us. "And I suppose you're proud of yourselves. Striking a soldier in a brawl is an enviable pastime for boys of sixteen. Isn't it? I suppose you'd like me to write home and tell your people that you've spent a week-end in gaol. They'd be delighted to hear it, I'm sure. Now wouldn't they?" He glanced at each of us in turn, his gaze finally settling on me. "Did you enjoy yourself?" he asked, his brows raised sarcastically.

"N—no, sir!" I answered. It had been on the tip of my tongue to say, "Yes."

"You didn't? I *am* surprised. You certainly gave me the impression, when I visited you, that you were having a grand and glorious time of it. I am sorry, in a way. After an enjoyable week-end you would be ready for plenty of hard work; more eager, as it were, to accomplish things." His bantering tone changed. "But enough of this!" he snapped out. "Your actions have put me to considerable expense and trouble—although I may inform you that Mr. Burns, the third officer, has reimbursed me for the money laid out on your account. Owing to your absence yesterday morning I had to order out some of the Chinese firemen to perform your duties. They refused at first. Mr. McNab, the third engineer, was struck by a spanner when he chased them from their quarters and I had to call a doctor. I had to ask the local authorities to station two policemen on board. All that costs money.

The work has been slowed up considerably. Our charter homewards may be lost. You are, the three of you, more or less responsible. You shall be punished. Have you got anything to say?"

Again he glanced at each of us in turn. In the first flush of the dawn his eyes had the glint of steel. We maintained a sullen silence, too cowed to speak.

"You have nothing to say," he went on, "which makes it so much easier. Your liberty is stopped for a period of six months. At sea you will be put on double watches and, in addition, work your afternoon watch below. You dine in the engineers' mess room. Well! You'll carry your own food from the galley and eat it in your cabins. You'll get the same as the crew and not a scrap more. I will have no more nonsense. Report immediately to Mr. Boxley. I have given him orders to work you from six to six in port, with only a half-hour for meals. Carry on!"

He stepped back into his cabin and slammed the door. We waited for a moment; then, on tiptoe, crept down the ladder to the deck below. Ah Tie, the cook, was in the galley. He grinned all over his face and saying "Catchee plenty hell," he handed us a loaf of bread and a pot of tea. Tiptoeing again, we reached the starboard half deck, entered, and closed the door very quietly behind us.

"H—he's rubbing it in," said Spifkins, munching a slice of bread voraciously. "We'll be doing nothing but work for the rest of our lives."

"Work . . ." (a bite) ". . . never . . ." (another bite) ". . . killed anyone," said I. "I love it!"

"I . . . I . . . thought that's what we went t—to gaol to escape."

"Was it?" asked Ernie, winking at me.

"Gosh! I believe it was," said I, and I embedded my teeth in a crust.



## CHAPTER X

### MISCHIEF AFOOT

NOTWITHSTANDING the severity of the punishment inflicted on us by Captain Walker at the height of his wrath, and the ever-recurring whispers of mutiny among the sailormen, there was a magic in the weeks that followed which changed the bluff-nosed old *Monarch* into a vehicle of romance and lightened the burden of our days. Locking the door of the starboard half deck on the evening of our return, we resolved, our hands across our hearts, that neither by word nor deed would we disclose to our shipmates how sorely the punishment irked. Instead, with smiling faces, we would work with a will, doing more than our share of the chipping, painting, and brass-polishing, even if it killed us. And we further resolved that if a pie, a loaf, or a can of fruit, should be lying unprotected in the galley or the pantry, we would purloin them and hide them in the half deck so that in the lonely graveyard watch we could appease the hunger in our innards and take the chill from the cold night air!

When the cargo of coal was discharged, and the holds swept down, the sacks of nitrate were stowed away on board and a departure was taken for New Orleans. A bleak, wind-howling norther obscured Cape Pilar at the western entrance of the Magellan Straits in a scud of rain, upset the calculations of Captain Walker, and sent the *Monarch* scampering for the Horn with water spouting from her scuppers and a smother of foam in her wake. Rolling her bulwarks under around Cape Stiff, she shook the foul weather from her stern and, heading northward, climbed the latitudes to Rio de Janeiro where, in a blistering heat, the bunkers were replenished while the crews of all the other vessels in the harbour slept.

Out again, the southeast trade fanning our fevered brows, and upwards over the equator, through the

doldrums, past Cape San Roque, breasting aside the yellow waters of the Amazon which discoloured the sea for miles, until, in a cool twilight, the anchor was let go in the harbour of St. Lucia in the West Indies. Singing negroes carried the bunker coal on board in baskets upon their heads. Ma Bonnet, the fat bumboat woman, came off with her baskets of fruit, and bundles of curios, balloon-fish, and gourds. She was a wealthy, jovial negress, with a heart as big as a house, who knew the captains of all the vessels that sailed the Seven Seas. When the moon sailed over the bay, laying a shimmering ribbon of silver on the water, she took us—Spifkins, Ernie, and myself—on shore in her boat, a great barge rowed by three silent blacks, and drove us in a carriage up a steep hill between walls of tropical vegetation smooth and shining as polished jade, until in a clearing we reached her plantation house. Her servants brought large goblets of lime juice sweetened with raw sugar and bowls heaped high with fruit—oranges, mangoes, and bananas—and she bade us drink and eat. When we had finished, we danced under the stars to the music of a guitar with her daughters and her nieces who had been educated in England. But the business of man is insistent. A hasty farewell and we were off for New Orleans with hearts as light as feathers, a vessel smothered from truck to keel with coal dust.

Always there were hours of study. In the quiet night watches when Captain Walker slept, Burns showed me from the bridge all the stars of first magnitude between the Southern Cross and Polaris and taught me how to know them, one from the other. In the daytime, too, he taught me to handle the sextant, and when I could “shoot the sun” with accuracy, he let me plot the position on the chart when I had worked it out. Ambition drove me on. I dreamed of the time I should command a vessel, guiding her over the trackless oceans to strange ports. I was confident of my ever-increasing ability until one day, in the Gulf of Mexico, the hurricane voice of Mr. Boxley broke in upon my reverie as I stood by the bulwark rail, gazing eastwards into the cool wind’s eye.

“Why the devil don’t you get on with your work,

instead of moonin' there like a lovesick coon?" he demanded to know. "These days you're gettin' as thick in the head as a stair head!"

I did not answer. He passed along the deck and entered his cabin. His bark was worse than his bite and I did not mind his rancour. Although still boisterous, stamping around with a scowl on his face and a chip on his shoulder, he was, of late, often morose and thoughtful. He realized, it was whispered, that he had made a mess of his opportunity and that by his actions he had started something he could not stop. Trouble was brewing in the Chinese fore-castle, and although they fulfilled their duties in the stokehold and engine-room, it was rumoured that the firemen had taken an oath to kill Mr. Boxley and Mr. McNab before the *Monarch* reached England, and that they were lying low, waiting for a favourable opportunity. I resolved, as the turn-to bell struck, to keep a weather eye open.

The night was sultry under the weight of a humid trade wind which had diminished as the sun went down. Gentle waves broke the grey surface of the Gulf with a swishing that was smothered, from time to time, by the plop and roll of the heavy bow wash. The darkness became more profound as, under a bank of cumulus, the sky pressed down, leaving only a star-studded rift to the northward which was like a gateway to a celestial palace. Drifting wisps of cloud took fairy shapes.

Four bells struck!

I shook the torpor from me with a vigorous swing of my arms and, leaving the rail, ascended to the bridge to relieve the wheel. Burns loomed up from the direction of the port cab and gripped my shoulder before I had reached the wheelhouse door.

"Nip along forrad an' see what's the matter with McCarthy," he ordered. "He hasn't answered the bell. I expect he's snoozin' an' dreaming about the grand time he's going to have in New Orleans to-morrow night. If he's asleep, let me know, an' I'll give him something to sleep on the lookout for!"



"Aye, aye, sir!"

The eerie quiet of a graveyard lay over the well deck, but as I groped my way towards the forward end, a muttering of voices came from the Chinese forecandle. With one foot on the ladder leading on to the forecandle head, I paused and craned my neck towards the alleyway. A glimmer of light came from around the closed starboard door. Gambling as usual, I thought, and, wondering if the game was fan-tan, I ascended to the forecandle head.

McCarthy was fast asleep. He lay sprawled over the port drum of the windlass, his head resting in the crook of his arm. I prodded him in the ribs with a stiff finger. He started up in fright, blinked around, and, perceiving me, grasped my arm, squeezed it, and cried:

"Are ye real, son?"

"I am!"

He sighed with relief and passed the flat of his hand over his brow and head.

"Jeez! I thought she was sunk an' I was dead without sayin' m' prayers," he exclaimed, profoundly moved, and added, as if to himself: "There would have been the devil of a row."

"There will be if you don't hurry up and strike the bells," I told him.

"Have they gone?" he asked anxiously.

"Five minutes ago. The third mate sent me forrard to see what's the matter with you."

He hitched his trousers and ambled up into the bow with surprising alacrity. He rang the large brass bell four times. He walked to the starboard rail, then to the port, his face turned aft. He sang out: "Lights are bright, sir!" He waited until the response came from the bridge before he returned to where I stood by the windlass. His face came close to mine.

"Did ye say his back was up?" he asked.

"I didn't. But it is. The Old Man hasn't turned in yet and he might feel like getting on the warpath before he does. He might have been listening."

"Ye won't tell him I was asleep, will ye? He might



stop my leave at New Orleans . . . or else log me five shillings."

"If I don't, what can I tell him?"

He pondered for a minute. He gazed down between the rails, as if seeking an excuse from the dark water. He looked back at me, shaking his head.

"I dunno," he muttered. After a few seconds he went on: "Ye see, it was the night. It was so soft I couldn't keep m' eyes open. But ye couldn't tell him that. He'd think the moon had kissed me." His eyes searched the dim line of the horizon. He continued sadly: "There's no sleep in the fo'c'sle . . . none at all. It's the Chinks. They're growlin' an' chewin' the rag an' playin' hell about something."

"I could tell him that," I suggested. "He might put a stop to it."

"He might, son," he agreed. "It would be better for all hands."

"I will then."

I left him by the windlass, leaning against the drum with his shoulders slumped wearily. Watch and watch is hard enough without losing sleep in your watch below. I had had a spell of it and I knew. But would Burns and Captain Walker take that as an excuse for falling asleep on the lookout? It would be as well to investigate the noise, thought I, descending the ladder, in case either of them questioned me on my return to the bridge.

Somewhat perturbed, I entered the forecastle alleyway. The black darkness held an ominous silence. I stamped heavily with my heels on the steel deck. The hollow sound was reassuring. I stepped towards the starboard door . . . halted . . . and retreated a little, awed by the babble of angry voices that came from behind it.

Indecision held me fast. I wanted to investigate, yet I had no authority to do so. I wanted to return to the bridge . . . to relieve the wheel . . . yet I was afraid of Captain Walker's sarcasm. It would have an edge, keen as a knife, if I failed to answer his questions fully.

"What's the matter there, Grant?" hailed Burns from the bridge. "Have you got lost in the dark?"

The sentences, driving through the night, impelled me into the alleyway. The door of the starboard forecandle rushed towards me. Grasping the handle with agitated fingers I turned it . . . tugged. The door was locked ! I thumped with my fists on the teak panels.

"Open up !" I shouted, assuming a tone of authority. "Open up, and hurry !"

The babbling within subsided. Benches scraped over the wooden deck. Feet scuffled. Whispered orders hissed with imperative emphasis. The commotion abated. I heard a grunt of satisfaction as footsteps approached. The door opened slowly and the enigmatic face of Number One appeared before me.

"'lo !" said he.

"Hullo !" said I.

"You wantee what ?" he asked.

"I want to know what all the noise is about," I told him.

"Me no savvy. Filemans asleep . . . allee time sleep. Me no savvy nothin'."

I didn't believe him. I brushed him aside and entered. The forecandle was foggy with tobacco smoke and dimly lighted by one bulkhead lamp. The nauseous odour of opium lay heavily on the air. On a lower bunk up in the forward end a Chinaman reclined, holding the bowl of a long-stemmed pipe over a tiny flame. Others lay in the deep shadows, apparently asleep. I walked over to where the table stood in the centre of the room and glanced around. Everything seemed in order.

"All is quiet and peaceful, Eh, Number One ?" I remarked. "Chinaman go to sleep like that !" I snapped my fingers.

His yellow face wrinkled amiably. "No catch him sleep, no catch him plenty steam," he said, his eyes boring into mine.

"They weren't, by any chance, awake and making plenty of noise a few minutes ago ?" I asked, baiting him.

He moved closer. With lightning swiftness his gaze passed over the men lying on the bunks. It settled again on me.

"Thlee-fou' hou's . . . long time sleep."

He was disturbed . . . watchful. He knew that I didn't believe him. He knew also, I believe, that there was nothing I could do. I walked towards the door. On the threshold I paused.

"The sailormen have complained that your men keep them awake. See that they remain quiet. Captain's orders."

As I turned away, his hand reached out and, as quickly, drew back. His face smiled but his eyes remained set.

"Allee light," he answered. "Me savvy."

From the concealing darkness of the forward well, I looked back over my shoulder. He was standing in the doorway watching me, his face thrown into relief by the flickering light of the bulkhead lamp, and it seemed to follow me, floating through space like an evil spirit as I hastened along the deck with the hand of fear clutched upon my heart.

Burns was standing near the top of the ladder when I reached the bridge.

"What's the matter with McCarthy, Tommy-boy?" he asked.

"He was asleep," I answered, and hastened to add: "The Chinks have been making such a row lately there's been little sleep for the sailormen."

"Did you tell them to pipe down?"

"Yes. I went to the fo'c'sle. Number One . . ."

"What's all this? Doesn't the wheel get relieved to-night?"

I spun around on my heels and faced Captain Walker.

"Yes, sir . . . aye, aye, sir."

"Well! It's fifteen minutes past ten. Be more punctual in future or I shall have more to say."

"Yes, sir!"

I half ran, half walked across the bridge, too agitated to speak. I wanted to relate what I had heard and seen in the Chinese forecabin, but I could not in face of Captain Walker's sarcasm. As I relieved the wheel, I overheard him reprimanding Burns for being too familiar with the cadets.

As the watch dragged on, my suspicions were lulled. By eight bells, the end of my watch, I could think of nothing else but sleep.

## CHAPTER XI

### MR. McNAB USES HIS FISTS

IN the forenoon watch I went to the first trick at the wheel with the sleep still in my eyes. Although it was spring, the wind had backed into the north with a touch of winter. I shivered a little and wished that I had donned a jersey over my shirt. Perhaps Burns would let me nip down to get it before Captain Walker came on deck for his morning walk across the bridge. With that thought in mind, I glanced up from the compass and gazed out through the forward window. A shiver of apprehension chilled me to the marrow!

Ahead the blue water scarcely reached one mile and broke, with a ripple of white, against the trunks and branches of innumerable trees. Beyond, on either bow and stretching away to the horizon, all was a dismal red, littered with debris like a plain devastated by a tornado.

Quick as a wink, I was at the wheelhouse door, one foot over the sill.

"Bruce! Bruce!" I cried, pointing ahead over the weather cloth with a rigid finger. "We're going ashore! We're going ashore!"

He straightened up from the rail table on which lay the chart and, with a most exasperating nonchalance, looked out through the window of the port cab. A smile was on his face when he turned to me.

"That's not the land, Tommy-boy," he said. "It's the flood of the Mississippi, carryin' all before it." He came over beside me. "You see," he went on, "the river flows from thousands of miles inland an', at this time of the year, it's apt to have the weight of the meltin' snow an' the mountain rains behind it. The Old Man left orders to be notified when the discoloured water was picked up. I'm goin' to tell him. Get back to the wheel."

I obeyed. The *Monarch* was swinging to port under



the influence of her engines. I steadied her to her course as, with a babbling along her run, she crossed the edge of the current and met the discoloured water of the river. My eyes were drawn irresistibly ahead for a sight of the land.

Houses appeared but no land! Perhaps they had become detached from New Orleans and were floating away on the flood. Perhaps people still dwelt within them. I wanted to ask Burns, but Captain Walker had come on the bridge and was standing by the rail, looking through his binoculars at the pilot boat which was standing towards us on the starboard bow, apparently unconcerned by the appearance of the houses.

Events crowded quickly upon each other to divert my attention. The engine-room telegraph rang; the *Monarch* stopped with a flutter of foam under her stern; the pilot came on board by the ladder suspended from the forward bulwark rail, ascended to the bridge with the air of a conqueror and, after shaking hands with Captain Walker, ordered full speed; the *Monarch* got under way again and headed towards a levee which seemed to extend for miles through a swamp.

The pilot entered the wheelhouse. His face was the colour of parchment and etched with many lines. He appraised me quizzically from jet-black eyes.

"Can you handle her?" he asked sharply.

"Yes, sir," I answered.

"Hmm! You've gotta be slick in the entrance." He glanced through the window. The *Monarch* was heading almost directly towards a small lighthouse on the end of the levee. "Steady as she goes!" he ordered.

"Steady, sir!" I answered.

He walked back and forth across the fore part of the wheelhouse, looking at me instead of towards the lighthouse, which seemed almost under the bow. He didn't appear worried or aware that Captain Walker was gazing anxiously in his direction.

"Say?" he asked, "where did you get the red cheeks?"

"I . . . I . . ." I stammered. The blood rushed to my face.

He brought his hands together with a bang. "Ah, ha!" he chuckled and, leaning towards me, he continued confidentially: "You'd better stay on board in New Orleans, boy. If the gals see them cheeks, they'll steal 'em, sure as fate!" He glanced over his shoulder . . . out through the window. "Port a little!" he ordered.

"Port a little!" I answered. I rattled the wheel over.

"They might even want to kiss you, boy!"

I glued my eyes ahead. The *Monarch* commenced to swing to starboard. The lighthouse on the end of the levee drew aft.

"How'd you like to be kissed by a Southern gal?" His gaze raked my face . . . turned ahead. "Hard aport!" he ordered.

"I . . . I . . . I . . . Hard aport, sir!" I stuttered, blushing more deeply.

In my embarrassment I jammed the wheel hard over . . . eased it back a little as Captain Walker twisted around from the waist and looked in through the window with nervous inquiry. The *Monarch* swung faster. I held my gaze on the levee.

"You wouldn't like it, eh?" the pilot went on. "You are kinda young." I had an urge to punch him on the nose. "But you will some day, boy." A long ribbon of water like a canal stretched ahead. "We all do. Steady her up now!" The order came with a commanding curt-ness.

"Steady her up, sir," I answered.

I ran the wheel amidships . . . put it over a little to starboard. The *Monarch* ceased to swing. I met her with the rudder . . . steadied her.

"Good!" exclaimed the pilot. "Steady as you go! Keep her in the middle of the channel!"

"Steady as you go, sir!" I answered. "In the middle, sir!"

The water was so smooth it rolled away from under the bows like the ribs of a gigantic fan and broke against the levees with a light brown curl. The pilot watched it for a moment; then, riveting his attention ahead, he lit his pipe.

When he was comfortably settled against the binnacle, I asked: "Is this the Mississippi, sir? I thought it was a big river."

He eyed me for a moment with amused amazement.

"It is!" he stated emphatically. "This is only one of the mouths of the delta. Two of them are used for deep-water vessels. Dredges keep them clear of silt and, boy, it's a constant job. The old river sure can carry down a gutful of dirt." He nodded towards the left. "That's pilot town," he said. "We live there with the mosquitoes." I looked at the group of houses I had seen from seawards. They perched on the levee like white gulls on a wall. "The Pass is about twelve miles long," he went on, "so it won't be many minutes before you see the river. I'll be leaving there. You change pilots this side of quarantine." He studied the compass for a while . . . squinted ahead along the line of the masts. "Keep her as she is going," he ordered and, buttoning his jacket across his chest, he joined Captain Walker on the bridge. Looking up, I saw beyond them the river widening to receive us.

I was disappointed. I had expected to see mountains and the land rolling away to the horizon with a soft coat of green to enchant the eye, but there was nothing except muddy water hemmed in by an unkempt, discoloured growth. For me the river lost its grandeur. I saw it as a creek, winding its renownless way through a pasture.

All day, after changing pilots and passing through quarantine, we skirted the bank to escape the full strength of the current, which was flowing with great rapidity. The overhanging branches brushed against the superstructure and I thought many times that the *Monarch* would crash through the levee and, with a sweep of water, destroy the small, dilapidated houses which seemed to cringe with terror before the destructive might of the river. I told the pilot so when I relieved the wheel in the dogwatch. He laughed at my fears.

"Boy!" he shouted boisterously. "You ought to see this ol' river when it's good an' mad. It's half-speed every mile of the way. If we went 'full', the bow wave would overlap the bank, mebbe make a hole or two. Sometimes,



with low-powered steamers, we can't go at all against the current an' we have to anchor until the flood goes down. Boy! You ain't seen nothin'!"

It would be exciting, I thought, to be on the river at the height of the flood.

Darkness had settled down when the *Monarch* rounded a bend and we came in sight of New Orleans. The lights along the water front reflected in the river like flickering candles and the loom of the city showed against the cloud-laden sky. An odour, sweet and pungent, drifted off from the land on a fickle air. It settled around the *Monarch*, and as she warped along the quay, where happy-go-lucky negroes handled the mooring lines with a great deal of vociferous mirth, I thought that by some strange alchemy she had been made part of a glamorous town.

After supper the following evening I dressed in my brass-bound uniform and went on shore. At the first corner I boarded a street car, paid my fare, and sat down. Instantly, it seemed, the conductor was at my side.

"You can't sit there!" he shouted angrily.

"Why?" I demanded to know. "I've paid my fare."

"You can't, I tell you. You're in the coloured section."

"I don't mind. There are no other seats."

"Get up or get off!"

He grasped the collar of my jacket as if to lift me bodily from the seat. He pulled the cord of the driver's bell. All eyes were on me. Everybody was laughing at my discomfiture, even the coloured people. I was up against something I could not understand. I left the street car and stood on the pavement, gazing after it until it lurched around a corner and disappeared from view. All desire to visit the town left me. I had allowed myself to be intimidated and was ashamed. How was I to know that in the Southern States the coloured people were segregated from the white in all public places and conveyances? How should I understand this racial antagonism? On the sea it was the man and not the colour that mattered. I should have defied the conductor . . . punched him on the nose.



But regrets were poor consolation. The opportunity had gone!

I wandered through the streets adjacent to the water front until I was footsore. When the moon came up, flooding everything with a cold, pure light, I stood in the deep shadows of short, leafy trees and became lost in the turmoil of my thoughts. Near me, behind the wooden walls, was life and laughter and the patter of dancing feet, but I heard it as from a great distance.

It was midnight when I returned on board, very tired and sleepy. I did not go on shore again.

One evening as I sat on the settee in the port half deck, my elbows on a board jammed in a drawer, while I frowned despairingly at some navigation problems Burns had given me to work out, the door burst open and Spifkins stumbled over the washboard in his haste to enter.

"Steady there!" I cautioned him, protecting my papers with my arms as he bumped against the drawer. "What's all the hurry?"

He gasped once or twice, controlled his breathing with an effort, and shouted: "There's . . . a fight!"

"A fight? Where?"

"O—on deck! Near the c—c—cross-bunker hatch. It's the third and a Chink, the one with the monkey face."

Hurling aside my pencil, I dropped the board in a drawer, jammed it shut and, leaping to my feet, pushed Spifkins roughly to one side as I flew past him. In a jiffy I had rounded the after house and was in full view of the cross-bunker hatch.

McNab, his air ruffled and his head shaking from side to side, had Wong Lee, a small, impudent fireman of the four-to-eight watch, by the scruff of the neck and the seat of the trousers and was shoving him towards the ladder which led down on to the forward well. Wong Lee twisted and turned and strove to kick Mr. McNab on the shins. Mr. McNab, releasing his right hand from the trousers, cuffed him on the ear and, lifting him bodily from the deck, shook him like a terrier would a rat.

"Ye're a cheeky, good-for-nothin' heathen!" he

shouted. "But I'll learn ye! Ye'll ha'e manners an' a sore head afore I'm done wi' ye!" Wong Lee, eyes flashing, leaped backwards and buried his teeth in the arms that held him. "Ouch! Ye would, would ye?" yelled Mr. McNab, jerking free.

He aimed Wong Lee for the opening in the windbreak at the top of the ladder and, with a vicious kick, sent him flying, head over heels, to the deck below.

Wong Lee sprang to his feet and ran forward, shouting at the top of his lungs. Out from the forecandle alleyway streamed his mates, jabbering with excitement.

Mr. McNab, apparently not a bit disturbed, rolled up his shirt sleeves, ran his fingers through his fiery hair, and re-ordered his attire with a provoking indifference.

"Ye'll stay where ye are, ye villains," said he, with a taunting laugh, "or ye'll feel the weight o' my fists. It would gi'e me immeasurable pleasure tae rip the hides from ye!"

He laughed again when they hesitated to approach. He squared his shoulders and, extending his arms, blocked the passage of the ladder. A murmur of anger arose among the Chinese. They gazed to right and left and, satisfied that no one else was in sight, pressed forward. I waited no longer. I ran round the deck in search of Mr. Selkirk, who was the officer of the night. But I could not find him. I sought the chief engineer, but he was not in his cabin. Spifkins was in the half deck, keeping out of harm's way. I yelled for him to follow me and, picking up a marlinespike from the floor, hastened to rejoin Mr. McNab.

"Get back frae danger, laddie," he shouted, perceiving me at his side. "Ye wouldna spoil my fun?"

"They'll kill you!" I shouted back.

"Kill James Anderson McNab, whose ancestors routed the Sassenachs at Bannockburn? D'ye ken what ye're sayin', laddie?"

"But . . ."

"Get back!"

With the back of his left hand he sent me spinning against the deckhouse as a Chinaman bounded up the

ladder, brandishing a stick. His right fist shot out. The Chinaman went down heavily, blood spurting from his nose. Others, screaming, took his place, jammed the ladder. Mr. McNab laughed and swung his arms like flails—while I watched with youthful admiration his intrepidity—until a dark figure drifted out of the gathering shadows and interposed.

Mr. McNab, spluttering an oath, fell back against the bulwarks, wiping his hands as if cleansing them from the filth of his antagonists. The Chinese retreated down the ladder, mumbling angrily.

“What’s all this ? A boxing contest ? Or an exhibition of brute strength ? Speak ! Are you all dumb ?”

It was Captain Walker who spoke. By his appearance, I concluded he had just returned from his after-supper stroll. In mufti he had lost some of his dignity ; nevertheless he held us all imprisoned by his supercilious stare.

“Well, Mr. McNab ! Have you nothing to say that might explain your . . . er . . . conduct ?” he asked in a tone that matched his look.

Mr. McNab bowed ever so slightly, took a step forward, and nodded in the direction of the well. “Weel, sirr. Ye see, I was just gein’ they heathens a lesson in deportment.”

“On whose authority ?” interjected Captain Walker sarcastically.

“My ain !” emphatically.

“And since when have you had jurisdiction over the firemen ?”

“Ye’re hagglin’ like an auld wife, sirr,” shouted Mr. McNab. “Some girls were on the wharf, strollin’ by tae get the air. I heard ane o’ they yellow heathens ca’in’ them names. He came up here on the bridge deck wi’ his dirty tongue. I cleaned it wi’ my fist. Noo ye can blaw aff ye’r win’ an’ ye’r high-falutin’ phrases. I’ve had my say !”

He bowed, grim and dignified, and swung away. I thought Captain Walker would explode with wrath at the outburst, but instead he reached out and grasped Mr. McNab by the arm.



"Just a minute," he said, and he turned to me and asked: "Is that so?"

"Yes . . . er . . . no, sir," I answered. "I . . ."

"You are not sure," he interrupted. "I understand." He gazed at the Chinese on the well and asked imperatively: "Is Number One there?" When Number One shuffled forward with a sullen air, he went on: "You will keep your men from trespassing on this deck. They will refrain from addressing persons on the wharf. If I hear of any more nonsense, I shall have more to say! Do you understand?"

"Me savvy," muttered Number One.

"Very well!" snapped Captain Walker. "Get forrard!"

When the Chinese had disappeared in the darkness of the forecastle alleyway, he turned with a shrug of his shoulders to Mr. McNab.

"You must try and be a little more diplomatic with the firemen," he said, his quarter-deck manner in abeyance. "You know as well as I that they are very touchy. I have even heard rumours of a . . . will I call it . . . a little ill feeling between you and them. We must have discipline but we must also be fair. Do not take it upon yourself to punish them. I shall be only too pleased to uphold you, should they ignore your authority. If you have any more trouble with them, please let me know. Good night."

He smiled pleasantly on us both, his handsome teeth showing very white in the darkness, and went along the deck and up the ladder to the bridge, very straight and extremely dignified.

"He's no' such a bad chap after a', laddie," said Mr. McNab, with a wise shake of his head. "T'll ha'e a try at what he advises. Mebbe they'll act a mite better."

"They should," I affirmed.

"Mebbe . . . mebbe . . ." he muttered, "but I ha'e my doots," and, his shoulders hunched with the weight of his doubts, he walked slowly along the deck and entered his cabin.

The following forenoon I went into the bunker space,



below the after end of the bridge deck, to fetch a length of pipe which Mr. Boxley had sent the day before to the engineers for threading. Mr. McNab had it in the vice, and as he turned the diestock with powerful muscles, he hummed a tune. He looked up and smiled when I stepped over the storm boards piled near the entrance.

"He's in a verra big hurry," he remarked, "but I'll ha'e it ready in a minute. Just sit doon on the bench there an' gie ye'r legs a rest, an' we'll ha'e a wee crack. It'll mak' the job lighter—no' that it's hard—an' I'll get some things that are troublin' me aff my mind. I've been thinkin' aboot last night." He paused to wipe the sweat from his brow. I vaulted on to the bench, crossed my hands around my knees, and gave him all my attention. He poured a little oil around the die and continued: "The Auld Man is right. Mebbe I'm a bit overbearin' on the Chinks. They're poor, misguided heathens an' tae be pitied. As they say in the kirk, I should be a shinin' example tae them. I thocht mebbe I might ca' Number One tae my cabin at dinner time an' tell him that I'm a wee bit sorry for my actions an' that I'm ready tae be fair."

"I think that would be a good idea. It might stave off the trouble that's brewing."

A fierce light illuminated the grey-green eyes, his mouth became bitterly scornful, as he laid down the diestock and frowned down into my face.

"I'm no worryin' aboot trouble, I'll ha'e ye ken," said he, prodding my knee with an iron finger. "Fechtin' is my middle name. I'd sooner fecht than eat. Let them try ony o' their capers wi' James Anderson McNab an' I'll snap their backs across my knee an' heave them tae the sharks. Trouble, d'ye say? I'll gie them a' the trouble they can stomach. I'll . . ."

I motioned him to silence. Wong Lee, carrying a shovel, stepped into the light from the gloom of the side bunker with an ugly scowl on his coal-blackened face and advanced towards the bench with soft, catlike steps. Pushing Mr. McNab to one side, I dropped to the deck and confronted Wong Lee.

"Hullo, Wong Lee!" I said affably. "What you want?"

The shovel went over his shoulder. His gaze, full of hate, went past me. "You clome bunkers," he said. "Me fight !"

An oath ripped out behind me. Mr. McNab lifted me bodily from my feet and threw me into a corner. "Ye're invitin' me tae fight, ye lousy scum !" he shouted. He picked up the heavy diestock. Instantly I was on my feet and between them.

"Get back ! Wong Lee !" I shouted. I faced Mr. McNab. "Remember what you were just telling me ! If you fight, you'll be as much to blame as he. Remember what you said !"

He lowered the diestock and looked down at me, shaken from his blind anger, yet reluctant to surrender to the thoughts which had come to him.

"You flaid," sneered Wong Lee, who had halted ready to swing the shovel at the first sign of an attack. "Clome bunkers. He leady fight !"

Mr. McNab's right hand clenched over the bar until the knuckles seemed about to burst through the skin ; but, when he spoke, his tone was impassive, almost serene :

"Get on with yer work, Wong Lee. I'll be ready—aye, an' willing—tae ha'e a fecht wi' ye in England, when we arrive."

Wong Lee spat his contempt and sank on to his haunches, as though in readiness to spring. "Clome bunkers now !" he taunted : "Me leady fight !"

Mr. McNab gave me a despairing look, muttered, "Tut ! Tut !", and like a flash leaped forward—and struck !

Wong Lee sagged at the knees, pitched forward on his face, the shovel flying with a clatter into a corner ; then Mr. McNab turned to me and said : "Ye'd better ca' the chief doon. I dinna want tae kill him the no'." And I ran away to obey.

The chief engineer came into the bunker space with the air of a man possessed of all the worries in the world. On perceiving Mr. McNab standing astride of Wong Lee like a colossus, he washed his hands deprecatingly and asked :

"What's been going on ?"

"This chap wanted tae ta' my head aff wi' a shovel an' I wasna in a position for him tae mak' a guid job o' it," remarked Mr. McNab.

"Dearie me!" said the chief. "We'd better take him up to the Old Man." He turned to me and went on: "Would you please go down into the engine-room and ask the second to let Number One come on to the bridge. We'd better have him there, too."

Captain Walker, lolling at ease, closed the book he was reading and surveyed us with lively interest when we arrived outside his cabin door, driving Wong Lee before us.

"More trouble, I see," said he, rising to his feet, and added as an afterthought: "Well, we might as well have it here in port as at sea. What is it now?"

Mr. McNab explained. When he was finished, Captain Walker asked, gazing at me with a slight hint of a twinkle in his eyes: "And you were there?"

"Yes, sir," I answered. "Wong Lee invited Mr. McNab to fight three times. He was forced into it."

"You are sure this time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Which is so much better!" Number One was asked the next question. "Has your man anything to say?"

Number One spoke in Chinese to Wong Lee. Wong Lee answered sullenly. Number One said: "Wong Lee speakee what you say allee light. Bye-m-bye catchee thlird engineer."

"So!" snapped Captain Walker

Entering his cabin, he sat down at the desk, took the blue-covered official log book from a drawer, spread it open before him, and commenced to write with a firm hand. Blotting what he had written, he scanned it, rose to his feet, faced the door, and ordered peremptorily:

"Wong Lee? Step forward! I have an entry here against you."

Number One whispered, his beetle eyes narrowed. Wong Lee shuffled forward to the door, his face devoid of expression. He nodded his head.

Captain Walker cleared his throat and read:

"Wong Lee, fireman, has this day been fined five shillings for insubordination." He looked up from the log book. "Have you anything to say?" he asked.

"Allee light," said Wong Lee.

"You are satisfied? Good!" said Captain Walker. "I may inform you that if you persist in your insubordination, I shall log you ten shillings next time for each offence and perhaps put you in irons. You may go!"

"Allee light," reiterated Wong Lee, with an irritating sneer, as he followed Number One from the bridge.

Captain Walker watched them until they were out of sight within the fiddley; then he remarked, addressing us all:

"I believe that will hold them in check. I do not like to use the log book, but sometimes it is necessary. If he behaves himself, I shall cancel the fine before we pay off. I am glad you brought him to me . . . very glad."



## CHAPTER XII

### MUTINY

A FEW days later the *Monarch*, laden to her hatch-coamings with logs and cotton, left her berth at New Orleans and proceeded to sea, homeward bound for London. The run through the Gulf, and from the Gulf through the Florida Straits, was uneventful. Burns, lounging lazily on my bunk, said it was the lull before the storm. When I laughed at his fears, he declared that there was always trouble brewing in a calm, whether on land, on sea, or on a vessel. But time, slipping past, seemed to refute his belief, and I concluded that the logging of Wong Lee had had the desired effect. North of Jupiter Light a course was set for England and the land quickly left behind.

On the second day the *Monarch* was about four hundred miles from the coast, well clear of the shipping lines between the United States and Central America and still in fine balmy weather. I was in the starboard half deck with Spifkins and Ernie, eating dinner from a plate on my knee, when a terrifying and agonized yell came from below.

"What was that?" exclaimed Spifkins.

"It sounded like the third!" cried Ernie.

I listened, frozen with fear. Had the Chinese attacked Mr. McNab in the engine-room while he was on watch? Had they killed him?

Again a yell . . . gurgling away to a moan of anguish! Silence! A demoniacal laugh of exultation!

I sprang to my feet.

"Get up on the bridge, Spifkins," I shouted. "Tell the Old Man. You get the mate, Ernie! Hurry!"

Frightened, they gazed at me; then, as the chief engineer and the fourth ran along the deck past the door, towards the engine-room alleyway, they leaped to their

feet and raced away to obey. Feeling on my belt for my knife, I loosened it in its sheath and flew into the alleyway on the heels of the fourth engineer.

The chief saw me as he opened the engine-room door. "Don't come down!" he shouted. "Stay on top to pass the word!" And he slid down the handrails of the ladders towards the bottom platform.

Dropping on my knees on the coir mat inside the door, I peered through the gratings. Quickly my eyes became accustomed to the lamp-lit gloom through which the plunging bottom ends gleamed. A dark figure drifted near them, slinking into the deeper shadow of the fan casing.

"Look out!" I yelled.

The chief raised his right hand to signify that he had heard and dropped from the lower grating on to a Chinaman who leaped on to the starting platform brandishing a pinch bar. They sprawled to the deck, the chief uppermost, his powerful right arm working like a flail. Slowly he struggled to his feet on the slippery floor plates, clutching the Chinaman by the throat. Once upright, he grabbed hold of the pinch bar, wrenched it from the other's hand and, swinging it over his head, felled him like an ox.

Twenty feet away, near the stokehold door, the fourth engineer, who stood over six feet, was fighting three men with his fists and driving them before him. The chief shut the stop valve of the main engines; then, bellowing like a bull, rushed into the fray, slashing to right and left with the pinch bar. The Chinese fled. The fourth slammed the door which led into the stokehold behind them and shot the bolt.

Next they picked up Mr. McNab from where he lay on the floor plates between the crank pits and brought him to the mess-room and laid him gently on the settee. He was unconscious. An ugly wound lay open on his head; another on his back below the shoulder ran red with blood.

"They must have sneaked up behind him when he was feeling round," said the chief, "and hit him with the bar. But they'll pay for it!"

"He's not dead, is he?" I asked, tremulously.

"No," answered the chief, dabbing the wounds with a wet towel. "He'll soon come round. Nip along and tell the chief steward to bring some friar's balsam and a bandage."

"Right-o, sir !"

I had reached the alleyway when Burns came bustling in from the deck. His shirt sleeves were rolled up. In his right hand he carried a revolver.

"The Old Man wants you on the bridge right away, Tommy-boy," he said quickly. "Be careful as you go along the deck. The Chinks have gone crazy. They're armed too !"

"But I've got to fetch the chief steward," I protested.

"What for ?"

"The third's been hurt."

"Never mind the chief steward. I'll get him. Get on the bridge. There's work to be done !"

He passed towards the mess-room. I went towards the alleyway entrance. A shot rang out, frightfully near. He reached out and clutched me by the arm.

"Go through the mess-room ! It's much safer !" he ordered imperatively. "Be careful now," he admonished, more gently.

I ran back into the mess-room. Mr. McNab was staring around with glassy eyes. The chief looked around inquiringly. "The third mate's coming," I said, and, leaping on to the table, I reached up, grasped the coaming, and clambered through the skylight on to the boat deck. Another shot rang out ! I dropped flat on the deck, I listened. Excited cries rose from beneath me ; none were near. I crawled on my stomach towards the funnel, keeping as much as possible in the lee of the lifeboats and the water tanks. Suddenly I halted, flattened to the planking. Ahead, very obviously hiding behind the galley skylight, lay a Chinaman !

I thought of retreating. But I had orders to report on the bridge ! Perhaps, too, there were Chinese behind me now. The vessel was a bedlam of noise. Holding my breath, I peered cautiously around the water tank. The Chinaman was facing away, gazing intently on the deck



below. I took the knife from my sheath, rose up silently on my haunches—and leaped!

Quicker than the wink of an eye I was astraddle him, my left hand on his neck, pressing his face to the deck, my right poised ready to strike if he resisted.

“Move and you’re dead!” I shouted.

The Chinaman twisted his head around under my weight and looked up at me.

“Lo!” he said, and recognizing me he smiled and said: “You no kill Ah Tie?”

It was the cook! His wizened face was quivering with emotion.

“What are you doing here?” I demanded to know.

“Me frightened an’ hide,” he answered. “Me no like fight. Chinamans no savvy nothin’. They talk—talk. Allee time talk plentee fight. Me no like.”

I eased my hand from his neck, yet warily alert. I thought he spoke the truth. He had been on the vessel for more than ten years. Surely, I reasoned, he would not jeopardize his position by being a party to the mutiny.

“Right you are,” I said finally. “I’ll take your word for it.”

His eyes lighted up and he nodded his gratitude. Crouching almost double, I dodged around the funnel, dropped from the fiddley at the forward end, leaped over the winch on to the cross-bunker hatch, grasped the rails of the lower bridge, hoisted myself up and vaulted over, landing breathlessly on the planking.

“Get doon, laddie, get doon!” shouted the old second mate, and when I obeyed, he went on: “Come over here!”

He was crouching behind the starboard harness cask, glancing nervously to the right and left. I crawled over beside him, hearing all around the sounds of strife.

“Yes . . . yes, sir,” I whispered.

“Tak’ this haunspike, laddie, an’ keep ye’r eye liftin’ on the starboard ladder,” he ordered. “Dinna let onybody come up—the Chinks, I mean. Ernie’s at the ither ladder, an’ Spifkins is standin’ by the wheel—he’s no’ steerin’, for the vessel’s as stopped as a wreck. I’m guan’



on the upper bridge tae keep a watch for smoke. A vessel nicht come by."

Into my hands he thrust a handspike, a wooden bar as long as myself, and, cautioning me to be very careful, he crept away towards the upper-bridge ladder, muttering to himself. I moved over to my station and, for the first time, looked down on bridge deck.

Captain Walker, a revolver in his hand, was on the starboard side, near a side-pocket hatch, exhorting three Chinese, who were armed with meat choppers and galley knives, to lay down their weapons and go peacefully to their quarters. Beside him stood Mr. Boxley, very red and grim, twirling a belaying pin around impatiently. The Chinese were sullen.

At that instant a wild outcry came from the port side. Mr. Boxley uttered an oath and raced for the fiddley entrance.

"Now! Now!" I heard Captain Walker shout after him. "Be careful. Don't shoot until I give orders!"

But Mr. Boxley was out of earshot. I looked over on the port side.

Pat Greenaway, the boatswain, and the fourth engineer were having their hands full. Armed with hatch bars, long pieces of iron three-eighths of an inch thick, two and a half inches broad, and in this case seven feet long, they were fighting two Chinese, who were attacking them with meat choppers. One man broke away, running forward under the shelter of the bridge house. The fourth engineer pursued him. The other man, crouching like a tiger about to spring, crept forward.

The boatswain swung the hatch bar over his head as the Chinaman rushed, yelling fiendishly. The bar came down. The Chinaman jumped to one side, and the bar, which would have split the man in two, missed and struck the deck, iron to iron. The jar shook it out of the boatswain's hands. The Chinaman jumped in; the meat chopper flashed brightly in the sunlight, swept in a curve through the air, and caught the boatswain across the wrist. Blood spurted to the deck as the wounded man turned and ran aft, with the Chinaman after him. Mr.

Boxley and Captain Walker came through the fiddley. Captain Walker's revolver spoke. The Chinaman stumbled, recovered, and tore headlong after the boatswain.

They disappeared under the overhang of the boat deck. Out on the deck cargo of lumber aft they came. The boatswain was clutching his wrist with his right hand; the Chinaman was charging along like a maddened bull, wounded unto death, yet determined to wreak vengeance on his tormentors.

A revolver cracked! The Chinaman dropped on his knees; then rose with an effort to his feet, and before he fell again to lie still, he threw the meat chopper through the air. It landed between the boatswain's shoulder-blades, stuck there for a second, then clattered to the deck.

Ping! A bullet struck the bulkhead close beneath where I lay. I started up in fright, then fell flat again on my stomach. On the starboard side, behind the side-pocket hatch, Burns was crouching, aiming his revolver at two Chinese who were directly beneath me. One had a large Mauser pistol, the other a wicked-looking knife.

Ping! The shattered paint flew up into my eyes. Burns was shooting wildly! It was only then I noticed that his right arm was hanging limp by his side and he was using his left. Blood showed through his white shirt.

The Chinese seemed to perceive his predicament, for they advanced in the face of his fire, shouting guttural oaths.

A sensation of utter weakness imprisoned me where I lay. The sweat beaded my brow. What should I do? What should I do? I could see Burns lying in the scuppers, bleeding to death, while I hid in safety behind the harness cask on the lower bridge. Hid in safety! The thought struck me like a blow between the eyes. The blood swept hot through my veins. A demon possessed me! I sprang to my feet with a wild cry, the handspike over my right shoulder.

"I'm coming, Bruce!" I yelled. "Hold them off. I'm coming!"

He laughed his cheery laugh, and for a brief moment

our eyes met ; then the Chinese, feinting around the side-pocket hatch, closed in. He flung his empty revolver into the face of the man with the Mauser pistol. He picked up a small hatch bar with his left hand and swung it over his head as the other leaped to the attack.

In a bound I reached the ladder, clattered down the steps, and leaped along the deck. With all my might I swung my handspike. The Chinaman with the Mauser pistol glanced around, strove to dodge, but the bar, whistling through the air, crashed into his face and he went down like a stone into the scupper. The impetus of my swing threw me off balance and I pitched on top of him.

Instantly I was on my feet, seeking a weapon. But I needed none. Mr. Boxley came from the fiddley, puffing and blowing and cursing like a trooper, and felled the other Chinaman with a belaying pin as he was about to leap on Burns.

"How long has this been going on?" Mr. Boxley demanded to know, his glance shifting from the scuppers where the Chinaman lay to me.

"I . . . I had to do it, sir," I protested. "There was no one here to help Mr. Burns."

"He's big enough to take care of himself," he snapped. "What d'you think this is? An orphanage?"

"He's wounded, sir," I cried. Burns had gone as white as a sheet.

Mr. Boxley swung on him. "What's the matter with you?" he asked impatiently.

"The Chink got me in the right shoulder. I just couldn't dodge it," Burns answered, trying to smile.

"That's a little different," said Mr. Boxley. "Go an' join the rest o' the cripples in the saloon. The Old Man is fixing them up with the help of the steward." He turned to me and continued: "The Chinks—what's left o' them—have been driven forrard into the fo'c'sle. Get up on the bridge an' tell Mr. Selkirk he needn't worry about his scalp. Wait up there for orders."

Two hours later Captain Walker came on to the bridge,





WITH ALL MY MIGHT I SWUNG MY HANDSPIKE





smelling very strongly of carbolic acid. Mr. Boxley followed him, chewing a quid.

"I'm afraid there's nothing else for it," Captain Walker was remarking. "We cannot trust the Chinese firemen and quite a number of the men will require hospital care. The expense of putting back to Hampton Roads will be very great, but I believe we have justification. You'll have to give the chief engineer all the sailors for stoking. He looked up quickly. "By the way, I didn't see any of the sailors on deck during the mutiny. Where are they?"

Mr. Boxley sniffed. "The blasted Chinks locked them in the fo'c'sle and stationed a man at the door with a gun to keep them there. They had it well planned, sir. Five o' them had Mausers . . . must have bought them in Chile. We should all be dead now, by rights!"

"You have them well secured?"

"Yes, sir! They are that! Spread-eagled on the after well an' shackled to the bulwark stanchions. They'd have to be magicians to escape. A day in the sun will take the fight out o' them!"

"Take care that no more of them die. It would be a little difficult to explain to the officials on shore. They do not seem to understand conditions at sea." Captain Walker laughed easily and took a turn across the bridge. Returning to Mr. Boxley he said: "See the chief right away. We must get the ship moving!"

I was ordered into the bunkers to fetch coal for the fourth engineer and a sailorman who were on watch in the stokehold. For five days the *Monarch* made her way slowly to Hampton Roads while I toiled with a shovel and a wheelbarrow in an atmosphere of coal dust and stifling heat, until my back was so bent and painful that I thought it would never straighten again.

But one fine spring morning Cape Henry came over the horizon and word was flagged to the signal station about the mutiny. Before the anchor was dropped, a naval cutter met us.

"What's the trouble, Cap?" her commander sang out through a megaphone.

Captain Walker, shouting back across the water, told him the story.

"Chinese, eh?" returned the commander, a surprised lift in his voice. He spoke to an officer by his side. They laughed. The officer nodded. Placing the megaphone to his mouth, the commander shouted :

"All right, Cap, string them along the bulwark rail and I'll pop 'em off. Got some men here who could do with a little rifle practise!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### COMMAND

I ROSE to my elbow and looked out between the bunk curtains as the door of the half deck opened to let in a blast of cold, raw air. Burns, with his heavy-weather overcoat buttoned across his chest and a woollen cap pulled down over his ears, laughed at my expression of inquiry, stepped over the washboard and, before I could prevent him, he thrust an ice-cold hand down the neck of my pyjamas.

"Ouch!" I yelled, fighting him away.

On the stormy passage across the Western Ocean his shoulder had healed with an amazing rapidity, and now, stronger than ever, it seemed, he lifted me bodily from the bunk and laid me on the cold floor in the full blast of the wind.

"It'll blow the cobwebs from your brain, Tommy-boy," he shouted, laughing heartily and flopping back on the settee. "Nothin' like an eye-opener on a mornin' such as this!"

"That's all very well," I grumbled petulantly, "but you might get up off my clothes so that I can put them on before I freeze to death."

"You don't need clothes on a mornin' like this," he returned, pulling the clothes from under him and throwing them at me. "The green hills o' Merry England—though I don't think they're very green this mornin'—are lyin' off to port. Beachy Head, with a white ruffle round its ugly chin, is drawing abeam, an' to-night—think of it, I tell you—to-night we shall be in London 'with a pocket full o' money an' a parrot in a cage'. Doesn't your heart go pitapat, Tommy-boy?" He waved his right hand towards me as though making an oration and misquoted:

"Are you the man with soul so dead,

Who never to yourself hath said:

"This is my own, my native land!"



"Yes! This voyage I am!" I declared emphatically. "I shall claim the land when I reach it."

"Why the thundercloud upon your lily-white brow? Why the scowl when I bring you glad tidings? Why . . . why . . . tell me why?"

I ignored his levity. In silence I quickly donned my clothes. I was wondering if he would laugh at me when I told him what was on my mind.

"Out with it, Tommy-boy, before it tickles your innards, slips through your gizzard, an' smacks you on the nose."

I looked at him for a full minute. "I've been thinking about Ah Tie, the cook," I told him "Every day on the homeward passage I have been thinking about him and watching him when I had the opportunity. I don't know why the Old Man didn't put him on shore and send him under bond to England for trial like he did the rest of the Chinese."

"Because he's been in the Company a long time an' he's all right."

"I'm not so sure. I told you where I found him on the day of the mutiny. He needn't have been there. He could have locked himself in the galley and no one could have touched him. The mutineers had all the meat choppers. Where did they get them? Not on bushes growing out of the sea. They got them from the galley and he gave them out. That's my belief!"

"Have you told this to the Old Man?"

I shook my head.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I have no proof. You can't accuse a man on that, even though he is a Chink. But he's been acting peculiarly lately, with a furtive look in his eyes. I won't feel safe until the vessel's tied up and he's discharged."

"Well, Tommy-boy, your hours of sadness have not long to run. Soon the sun will burst through the storm clouds an' settle upon you. I am sorry I cannot grieve with you. My thoughts are with you, dearly beloved pal, but my heart's in England."

"Can't you be serious?" I growled.

"Always ! Never was more so in my life, Tommy-boy. But you ridiculed my suspicions once . . . scorned my fears. Dost remember a time in this very cabin after New Orleans ?"

"Yes, I remember, all right. And do you remember what occurred later ?"

"A mutiny ! Ah !" He held up his hand for silence. "But such exciting episodes happen only once in a lifetime. It would be more stimulating an' add a zest to this life, if they chanced along more frequently."

He rose and stalked past me with a lordly air. At the door he halted, gazed imperiously down at me, and said :

"It is ten minutes to eight. Don't forget you have the first wheel at eight bells. You'd better nip along an' get your breakfast from the galley. You'll feel much more cheerful with your bunkers aboard."

"I don't feel like breakfast. I'll munch some hard-tack. There's some in the drawer."

"Ho ! Ho !" He leaned towards me with a merry twinkle in his eyes. "A little touch of Channel fever, Tommy-boy. Your heart does go pitapat for old England ?"

Grabbing up a pillow, I threw it at him. "Get out before I throw you out !" I shouted.

"Such a threat must be respected," he replied, making the mockery of a bow. He threw the pillow full in my face and went out.

I sat down on the settee, chewing on a piece of hard-tack. I was more troubled than I cared to admit. I blamed myself in a way. I should have stabbed Ah Tie when he lay hidden behind the galley skylight. I shuddered and strove to concentrate my thoughts on the arrival of the vessel, late that night. It should have cheered me up. But it didn't.

Eight bells, striking on the bridge, drifted through the ventilator on the wind. The hard-tack was tasteless and dry, like a piece of wood. I threw it back into the drawer and, rising, pulled on a jersey and left the half deck.

Ah Tie was in the galley, stirring a pot of curried meat

over the stove as I passed along the deck to relieve the wheel. I paused by the half door. Ah Tie looked across his shoulder and twisted his face into a grimace which was supposed to be a smile.

"'lo," said he.

"Hullo, Ah Tie," I answered affably. "I suppose you're glad we're getting in to-night. You'll be able to hear from your . . ." a moment's hesitation ". . . friends."

He shrugged his narrow shoulders. "Chinamans plenty damn fools. Allee time touble. I no want see."

"I suppose not," said I.

He seemed perfectly harmless. But it struck me, after McCarthy had passed over the wheel and the course, that Ah Tie had known to whom I alluded. The Chinese were his friends! Instantly I realized how morbidly suspicious my thoughts were becoming, and I resolved to gain a perspective of optimism as quickly as possible.

The vessel was holding to her course with a few spokes of the wheel. I looked out of the lee door. Captain Walker, with shining, new brass buttons on his greatcoat, was standing on the port wing of the bridge, yarning to Burns, while he kept an eye lifting on the land which stretched, bleak and denuded by winter, from the beam to a point very fine on the bow. Beyond him a brown-sailed drifter lay on the port tack, beating to windward against a stiff easterly breeze, and, farther away, a mile or so apart, two coasters were hugging the land as though their skippers were afraid of the open sea.

"I'll never carry Chinese again," Captain Walker said. "I'm going to take it up with the superintendent on arrival. He likes them, but then, he doesn't have to sail with them. I'll tell him so. Give me white men any time. They may get drunk once in a while and fail to report for duty, but they never fight with revolvers and meat choppers. Yes! Next trip it will be white men."

"An' cooks too?" asked Burns.

"Most certainly. I kept Ah Tie because he has been so long in the service . . . but out he goes, bag and baggage, when we get in. As a matter of fact, I'm sorry I didn't pack him off with the others. I have learned



since that he supplied them with opium. He is very wealthy."

The breakfast bell rang. Captain Walker walked on to the centre of the bridge and ran his eye along the line of the land.

"Are you on your course?" he asked through the wheelhouse window.

"One degree to starboard, sir," I answered.

He nodded his head and addressed Burns, who had approached.

"This course will do until I have my breakfast. Get a distance off the Royal Sovereign light vessel. If, by any chance, we should set in on the land, let me know."

Humming a tune, he cast his eyes around again and went down the ladder. Burns waited until the door on the deck below banged shut; then he came into the wheelhouse. He leaned on the work table and looked out of the window.

"Did you hear what he was sayin', Tommy-boy, about the Chinks?"

"Yes."

"An' now you can be as happy as a lark in the sky?"

I knew that he was kidding me. I answered him in the affirmative with a curt "yes".

He must have felt that I was not in a mood to be teased, for he turned and walked out of the wheelhouse. He went up on to "monkey island". The binnacle cover thudded on the platform, and the azimuth mirror squeaked on the glass of the compass as he swung it around. He was taking a bearing.

Half an hour passed; then Mr. Selkirk came on to the bridge, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. He paused at the top of the ladder, stood as though he were listening at a closed door; then, stepping into the wheelhouse, he lighted his pipe before walking out to relieve Burns on the wing of the bridge.

"Ye can go an' get yer hash," he said, "an' I might recommend tae yer attention the curry an' rice. It's a dish fit for a king an' for a man famished wi' hunger."



"Right-o!" said Burns, and he laughed and left the bridge.

Mr. Selkirk, a satisfied look on his lined, wind-tanned face, leaned back on the canvas dodger so that he could sight Captain Walker as soon as he left his cabin.

Another half an hour passed. The tip of Dungeness Lighthouse appeared above the horizon like the black top of a ship's funnel. The four-masted barque, *Auchenbank*, with a flutter of gulls at her stern, came down channel on a fair wind, with all her sails drawing and a bone in her teeth. Away to the southward a blue haze lay over France like a warm blanket. The *Monarch* was very peaceful and shining with new paint.

Suddenly Captain Walker's cabin door struck the bulk-head with a resounding bang. Mr. Selkirk slipped the pipe into his pocket and straightened up, looking guiltily over his shoulder. The chief steward, an apron around his waist and his sleeves rolled up above the elbow, came running up the ladder to the upper bridge.

"The Old Man's sick!" he shouted to Mr. Selkirk.

"I'm no feelin' so verra guid masel'," said Mr. Selkirk, pressing his fists against his stomach.

He breathed heavily. His face had gone very pale under its tan. The click of his teeth as he clenched them together could be heard all over the bridge.

"The Old Man wants you right away," shouted the chief steward.

"Ye'd better ca' the mate," said Mr. Selkirk.

"He's sick too and vomiting all over the place," the chief steward cried impatiently. "You'd better come down. He wants you right away."

Mr. Selkirk cast a despairing glance around and now, almost doubled up with pain, lurched to the wheelhouse door, where he held on to the jamb and said to me:

"Keep yer eye skinned, laddie. I'm guan doon."

He walked to the ladder, moaning and retching at every step. I wondered what had overtaken him so suddenly. Suspicions sped through my head on the heels of each other. I wanted to leave the wheel. But there was no one at hand to relieve me. The vessel was a



THE FOUR-MASTED BARQUE, *Auchenbank*, CAME  
DOWN CHANNEL ON A FAIR WIND



hullabaloo of excited voices and running feet and I had no authority to command a relief.

Spifkins appeared at the wheelhouse door as if in answer to my thoughts.

"The chief steward told me to relieve you. The Old Man wants you in his cabin. He's sick!" he said. "All the officers are sick and the chief engineer."

I gave him the course. I ran out on to the bridge and glanced around the horizon. Two vessels were in sight, but neither of them crossing our track. I slid down the handrails to the lower bridge and entered Captain Walker's cabin without knocking. He squatted by the settee, bent double with pain over a basin. He turned a livid face to me.

"You know the Rule of the Road?" he asked, from between clenched teeth.

"Yes, sir!"

"And . . ." a violent retch, ". . . can take bearings?"

"Yes, sir!" Eagerly!

"A—and lay a course?"

"Yes . . . yes, sir!"

He tried to straighten up, but a convulsion wracked his body and he gritted his teeth and held on tightly to the table's edge. It was fully a minute before he spoke.

"Something in the food has poisoned us. Go up on the bridge and take charge. We haven't far to go . . . about fifty miles. We'll take a pilot from the Downs." He breathed deeply once or twice and continued: "If you're in doubt about anything, come down. I'll be with you as soon as possible. I've ordered the steward to mix emetics for us all. We'll be all right soon. Be very careful!"

"Yes, sir! I will, sir!"

He waved me away as he doubled up over the basin. I stumbled backwards over the doorstep in my eagerness to obey. I started to run; then it dawned on me with an astounding clarity that I was in command! Command! It thrilled me. Assuming an air of dignity I did not possess, I hastened as quickly as possible to the half deck, where from the wardrobe I took my greatcoat with its



brass buttons and my deep-sea cap, and put them on. Out on deck, on my way to the bridge, a thought struck me. I entered the saloon alleyway. The chief steward was in the pantry, mixing medicine in a glass.

"Save the food that was served at breakfast. An order from the Old Man." I lied with assurance.

"I haven't got it. It's gone!" he said.

"Where?" I demanded to know.

"The cook came a few minutes ago and took it all back to the galley," he answered. "He always does."

Throwing my dignity to the winds, I raced to the galley door. Ah Tie was sitting on the bench smoking a pipe. He clouded his face in smoke when he perceived me looking in at him.

"'lo," he said.

"Where's the food left from breakfast?" I asked, endeavouring to be calm.

"All gone down chute," he answered placidly. "Him no good."

I turned away beaten. It was my own fault. I should have thought of the exigency and commandeered the food immediately after I knew that Captain Walker and the officers were poisoned. My stupidity angered me. I felt that I had failed in a crisis and suffered mentally for my negligence.

I stalked on to the bridge. The February day was cold and clear. The sea was grey-green and hard. The land was bold against the winter sky. I took a great gasp of the bracing air and felt immeasurably better. Soon elation bubbled through my veins with the vigour of a mountain stream seeking the sea. Was I not in command? The responsibility stimulated me, sobered me.

I took bearings and laid them off on the chart to assure myself of the vessel's position. Dungeness drew abeam. I altered the course for the South Foreland. From time to time I descended to the deck below and informed Captain Walker what I had done. He moved over to a port and looked out only once. What he saw must have satisfied him, for he ordered me to carry on.

Towards noon the chief steward reported with an

ingratiating servility that all his patients were doing well, though still very sick. They would recover. He would like to bring me some dinner on the bridge. I thanked him and told him not to bother. He bowed and went away. At the moment the clean, cold air was food enough for me.

The sun burst through a rift in the clouds with a dazzling brightness when the *Monarch* steamed past the South Foreland into the Downs with her engine-room telegraph on "Stand By", her ensign fluttering over the stern in the breeze, and the pilot jack at the foremast head.

"Get the ladder over the port side!" I shouted to the sailormen on the foreward well.

"Aye! Aye, sir!" they answered and sprang to obey with alacrity. The sight of land quickened their limbs.

The pilot cutter came down on the starboard side and rounded up under the stern. The *Monarch* stopped in her wake and the pilot came on board. He was a burly man with a heavy black beard. He dropped from the bulwark rail to the deck with a grunt. I waited for him on the upper bridge. He stomped up the ladder with a dogmatic assurance.

His gaze caught mine . . . faltered. He glanced around the bridge.

"Good afternoon, lad," he said gruffly. "Is the captain about?"

"I'm in charge," I told him.

He extended his hand and crushed mine in a vigorous, conscience-smitten grasp.

"I'm sorry, sir," he hastened to say. "I didn't . . . eh . . . well . . . you looked too young to be the captain. But you never can tell. Can you, sir? Age sits lightly on some."

"That's all right," I said, waving his apology aside. "She's stopped, pilot. We're drawing twenty-four feet and in from the States."

"Right, sir! If they shake her up down below, we'll just catch the midnight tide. I suppose you want to get home, Captain?"

He walked out on to the bridge. I watched him swing the handle of the telegraph to "FULL SPEED" through a haze that came across my eyes. He had addressed me as "Captain"! The buttons on my greatcoat strained across my chest. I walked out on the bridge beside him. The proudest moment of my life had come!

## CHAPTER XIV

### "YOU'RE A SAILOR"

A WEEK later I was in the half deck, packing a port-manteau to take home with me on holiday when a knock came on the door and the chief steward opened it.

"The Old Man told me to tell you to put on your uniform and come to the saloon. He wants you."

"What for?"

"I don't know. They've just finished dinner and they're yarning over their cigars."

"All right. I'll be along in a jiffy."

He went along the deck and, after brushing my hair and donning my uniform jacket, I followed him. I wondered what the captain could want me for. Perhaps cancel my leave? He had done so earlier in the week, when I had been on the point of departure. Surely he wouldn't do it a second time! If I didn't get away now, I never would, for the *Monarch*, littered with beams, hatches, and dunnage, was about discharged. It would be a bit thick if he did! I resolved to protest vigorously, knowing, at the same time, that it would be useless.

The saloon was blue with tobacco smoke. A fire burned brightly in the grate. It was very warm. My eyes watered and I passed my hand across them. Before I had become accustomed to the haze, a voice said:

"Hullo, laddie!"

It was Captain McFarlane. I blinked across the table at him.

"How are you, sir?" I stammered out.

"Weel an' fit as a fiddle. I hear you've been makin' a name for yourself."

A name for myself! I couldn't quite grasp what he meant. My gaze flew around the table. Captain Walker! Mr. Boxley! Mr. Selkirk! Burns! The Marine Superintendent! They were all looking at me and smiling. I



became self-conscious. The blood rushed to my face. A cold perspiration came out all over my body. If only I could run away, I thought. I was afraid of what they might say. A lightness took my head and I grasped the table's edge.

The Marine Superintendent rose to his feet. He picked up a box which lay before him. He turned his eyes on me and said:

"I have been asked by Captain Walker and his officers to present this sextant to you. It is a small token of their regard and esteem. You have, by your actions, not only proved yourself to be a sailor, but also a man. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to perform this ceremony. May this instrument chart your course and keep you clear of the reefs as you make the journey through life."

With trembling hands I took the box which he held out to me.

"Speech! Speech!" cried Burns.

I looked wildly from one to the other. They sat expectantly. Waves of inarticulation swamped me. I struggled for words, but they would not come. I wanted to tell them my gratitude. I wanted to tell them that I would be worthy, but emotion choked me.

"You're a sailor, all right," the Marine Superintendent said. "You'd much rather climb a mast than make a speech."

And Captain Walker said: "We won't keep you any longer. I know you want to go on leave. You may go."

Their laughter followed me as I ran blindly from the saloon. Out on the deck the cold air steadied me, but when I reached the half deck, I sat for a long time on the settee, gazing at the sextant lying on my knees.







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